A BEGINNER

A

146

A BEGINNER

4. 10 - 94

BY

RHODA BROUGHTON

AUTHOR OF

'GOOD BYE, SWEETHEART!' 'NANCY,' 'SECOND THOUGHTS,' ETC.

Hippolita. This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.
Theseus. The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.

THIRD EDITION

LONDON
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen
1894

'Oh, thanks! That is all.'

There is an ill-stifled disappointment in her tone; and though 'they' have not come, and there is no reason why she should remain on her feet expecting them, she is too deeply excited to sit down and seek the calm lent by stitching, or the distraction imparted by a book. She walks to the window, and looks out. Her turret is so high that the eye plunges at once into the tree-tops; but among those tree-tops there is not much happening now in late October; through the thinning leaves one can see the rooks' nests with great distinctness; but their grown-up and gadabout owners, so seldom at home, excite but little of the interest called forth by the 'tender Juvenals' of April; nothing to absorb a feverish attention, or make the clock-hands quicken their snail pace. It will be unconscionably inconsiderate to repeat her ring and her question under half an hour. The very instant that that time has elapsed, the former jerk downwards of the bell-handle is repeated, and is answered with promptitude. But before

William opens the door, the hope has gone out of Miss Jocelyn's face. 'He has not got them! He could not run up if he had! They are not come!'

'Has the cart from the station arrived yet?'

'I do not know, 'm. I'll inquire.'

'Servants' heads will never save their heels!' is her inward remark, and then she stands still in the middle of the room, too eagerly listening even to try to distract herself by the sight of the autumn colour outside.

A third time the mounting foot is heard; and this time a smile breaks over the young lady's face.

'He is coming quite slowly! I hear him panting! He has them!'

It will show an unseemly haste to open the door before the labouring messenger has reached the top of the stairs; so with great difficulty she masters her impatience enough to wait till her ear tells her that he is just outside; then she flings her portal wide, and 'they,' the long-expected, are carried in.

'This parcel has just come by the cart for you, 'm.'

He speaks with an unconcealable pant, for 'they' are heavy. 'They' are obviously books.

'Oh, indeed!' with a not very successful air of indifference;—'put them down on the sofa; no'—(as she eyes the large proportions of the brown-paper-covered package);—'on the floor.'

'Shall I undo the string, 'm?'

'No, thanks, I can manage it myself.'

He is gone, and at once she flies upon her acquisition. No one who intends to attain great wealth ought ever to cut a bit of string; and in one of the story-books on which the infant minds of the now waning generation were fed, stories with a directer and more knock-me-down moral than the present race of nursery readers would stand, the writer of this tale remembers two boys represented as owing their respective attainment of the Lord Mayoralty and the gallows to their different treatment of this article of commerce. But Miss Jocelyn, recklessly

disregarding this golden rule, whips a pair of scissors out of a case, and with two or three vigorous cuts, releases her imprisoned treasure. With only one pleased glance at the publisher's name which surmounts her own on the address—

'*From*

'*Messrs. Brent and Lockwood,*

'*Cheapside,*

'*London, E.C.*'

she tears apart the thick and threefold papers—stout brown, less stout brown, white—and sees her volumes standing in a virginal row—for their bindings are carefully white wrappered—before her enraptured eyes. Her first care is to count them. 'One, two, three, four, five,' up to 18. 'They have sent me six sets; very handsome of them! I wonder do they always do it? or does it mean that they think there will not be much demand for the book?' But the cold of this douche-like thought is not suffered to chill her radiant warmth of new possession for more than an instant. She is sitting Turk-

like on the floor before her 18 vols., and now picks up one, and stripping off its over-coat, gazes at its neat and rather coquettish cretonne cover with profound satisfaction. 'They have got it up extremely nicely; the eye is pleased, at all events; which is something gained at once!' She turns to the title-page, and reads:

'MICHING MALLECHO,'

BY

A BEGINNER.

She repeats it aloud, as if to test it on her ear—'Miching Mallecho.' 'Yes, surely a good title. It excites curiosity, and tells nothing, and "By a Beginner." That must certainly disarm hostility. No critic could be harsh to one who owned herself a beginner. I say "her," but I have my hopes that the reviewers may be at fault in that respect, that they may take me for a man. There are one or two passages that——' She turns the pages fondly, seeking for some of those 'purple bits' of virile dealing with the passions, and handling the

problems of life, which are to turn the hounds of criticism off her track. She reads one or two aloud, as she had done the title, and with the same object of trying their value on the ear; and that ear is so occupied by them as to give no warning of the approach of another intruder upon her bower, until that intruder pushes open the door, and crying 'Emma!' enters.

'How anyone can live from choice in such a crows' nest!' ejaculates the new-comer between two efforts to recapture her breath, and sitting down with the heaviness of a good many stones and years on the nearest chair; then, looking round with surprise at the emptiness of the room of any one but her niece: 'I thought I heard you talking to someone. Were not you talking to someone?'

There are limits to the powers of truthfulness of the most truthful among us; and Emma, though without taste or talent for lying, finds it for the moment physically impossible to explain to a near relation, who is quite ignorant of her literary future,

that she has, from pure delight in her own composition, been reading aloud passages out of her maiden novel to no audience but her admiring self.

'I—I was not talking to anyone!'

'No? Well, then, it was the wind. How you can stand the tricks it plays round this horrid little aerial pepper-pot—oh, I see the carrier has brought the books at last! I began at length to give up all hopes of them, and thought that my list had got enclosed in someone else's envelope. What are they—anything good? What is that one lying on the floor. It looks like a brand-new copy! I have always rather a weakness for new books, before they have lost their trimness and got loose in their covers.'

She stoops as she speaks, and picks up the volume, which, since Emma had sprung to her feet at Mrs. Chantry's entrance, had fallen off her lap on the floor, and, having wriggled out of its outer wrapper, now lies half open, face forward, confessed in all the charms of its cretonne roses and love-knots, at its distracted author's feet.

Her confusion has the effect of discourtesy; she is too paralyzed to pick up the book for her aunt, who, stooping with a slowness born of fifty winters and twelve stone, possesses herself of her prize. She has not her glasses on, which accounts for her not remarking the absence of the Librarian's sign-manual from its exterior.

When she does try to put on her pince-nez, she finds that the thin gold chain on which they hang has become entangled in some part of her dress. To her niece it appears at least an hour before they are set free—astride upon Mrs. Chantry's handsome nose, and applied to the title-page.

'"Mi-ching Mal-le-cho." What an idiotic title!'

'It is Shakespeare!' says the tortured parent, with a gasp.

'Is it? Then he ought to be ashamed of himself! Whosever it is, it is an idiotic title! "By a Beginner." I do not like "beginners." Preserve me from 'prentice hands! I am very sure that I never sent

for "Miching Mallecho"' (with a laugh of ridicule); 'I should never have dreamt of sending for a book with such a title. You did not send for it, did you? But of course you did not, for I wrote the list myself.'

'I did not send for it, but—I——' begins Miss Jocelyn desperately, in a choked voice; but, before her confession is reached, Mrs. Chantry interrupts her.

She has stooped again towards the floor, and is turning over the other seventeen volumes, and making a running commentary as she does so.

'What else has he sent? And why have they come in brown paper instead of a box? And why are they all dressed in white nightgowns?' in a crescendo of surprise; then reaching the culminating point as she reads a second, a third, and a fourth time. '"Miching Mallecho" again! and *again!* and yet AGAIN! Has the man gone mad? Is it a practical joke? My dear child, have *you* gone mad and sent for eighteen "Miching Mallechos"?'

The avowal can no longer be shirked.

'I did not send for the book. But these are presentation copies which the publishers have sent me, because—I wrote it.'

Mrs. Chantry's eyes, despite her fifty years, are still very good-sized ones, and at these words they become enormous.

'*You*—WROTE it?'

'Yes, I wrote it.'

'And got it published?'

'And got it published.'

'Then you are the "Beginner"?'

'Yes, I am the "Beginner."'

The young author is conscious that she is owning her soft impeachment in the terms of an Ollendorffian parrot; but there is something in her aunt's tone and in her whole look which renders any more expansive form of confession impossible.

'You have written a three-volume novel, called "Miching Mallecho"?'

'Yes.'

'You and Shakespeare—it ought to be good!'

This is not kindly, and Mrs. Chantry

knows that it is not; but, like Zimri, of whom we all have heard that it was said 'he had his jest, and they had his estate,' Mrs. Chantry's jest through life has always gone before her regard for her estate. There is a quiver of malicious laughter about her nostrils as she says it, though in her heart she is feeling sore, so sore that she has scarcely a prick of compunction when she perceives, by a sudden movement on the part of her adopted daughter, that her shot has told. What, indeed, is the use of living with a person unless you can make sure of always placing your arrow in the bull's-eye of his or her foibles and weaknesses? But in the case of the present marksman, the soreness which preceded and caused it survives the joy of successful ill-nature, and in a moment or two she says, in quite another key:

'And so I was not to have been let into the secret? Well, I have always heard that a man's foes are they of his own household. But for an accident I was never to have been told.'

'There you are wrong!' says Emma, the

anger and mortification which her aunt's sharp jest had called into her face disappearing in a pink flush of self-defence. 'I was only going to wait till it had been a success —I think it *must* succeed—that what came so straight from my heart must go straight to other people's—I was only waiting till I could lay my laurels at your feet, and now perhaps there will be not a twig to lay! And indeed I should have told you long ago—at the very beginning—only you know, you dear thing' (putting a caressing arm round the elder woman's shoulders), 'that this is a gossipy neighbourhood, and that you do talk a good deal. What you say is delightful, but' (laughing) 'there is a good deal of it.'

'Oh yes, I understand,' in a half mollified, half offended tone, 'I am a blab and a sieve; but I should not have blabbed about "Miching Mallecho." In the first place the honour of the family would have stopped me, and, in the second place, I should not have known how to pronounce it.'

They both laugh the relieved laugh of two

genuinely attached persons who have been on the verge of a quarrel and avoided it.

'And now,' asks the aunt, resuming the conversation, and still unable to keep out of her voice a tinge of persiflage as she once more pronounces the obnoxious name—'and now, would you mind telling me what "Miching Mallecho" means?'

'Shakespeare says, "It means mischief."'

'H'm! I now see why you chose to move up to this cock-loft. And may I ask how you got it published?'

'I sent it to one publishing firm after another until I found one who consented to take it.'

'Did it travel a good deal?'

'Well, yes,' reluctantly; 'four or five re-
'C ed it.'
knows am afraid that did not look as if they
'I co ht much of it.'
'she took, of course, they did not read it!'
drove ov 'I believe publishers are so deluged
she bounde S. that they do not attempt to look
act. I was very angry with her.'

'But you forgave her on condition that she floated the enterprise? I wonder how she

was that their readers did not throw it into the waste-paper basket by mistake!'

Here is another opening which Mrs. Chantry finds almost irresistible, but she commands herself to the extent that it is not her tongue but only her eyebrows which say, 'Are you sure that it would have been by mistake?' But her niece understands her eyebrows quite as well as her speech and winces.

'Well, what matter a few shipwrecks if it got into port at last—if it found a comfortable home with Brent and Lockwood!'—reading, 'The name does not seem very familiar to me!'

'They have only set up lately. They are quite new, and very enterprising.'

'And they took it?'

'Yes.'

'And sent you a blank cheque at the g
time? No, do not look so angry; I of
they did not. But are you to ma in
money by the transaction?' own

'Of course not!' still more hastily.

They both laugh the relieved laugh of two

that a writer must always make up his mind to make nothing by his first book.'

'What a pity, then, that he cannot begin with the second!'

'Of course, I shall make no money by it; not that I care a straw about that! In fact' (reluctantly), 'I suppose I ought to tell you that I had to advance fifty pounds to cover possible losses before they would consent to publish it at all.'

'Fifty pounds! How did you get hold of fifty pounds? I wish I could afford to treat fifty pounds with the airy lightness you do!'

'I saved some out of my allowance, and Lesbia lent me the rest.'

'Oh' (wounded again), 'then Lesbia knows! You told Lesbia?'

'I could not help it,' in a distressed voice; 'she took me by surprise; one day when she drove over, and found no one downstairs, she bounded up here, and caught me in the act. I was very angry with her.'

'But you forgave her on condition that she floated the enterprise? I wonder how she

managed it! She is generally on the verge of bankruptcy herself.'

'She borrowed it from her husband—from Tom.'

'Ah, indeed! then Tom knows, too?'

'He did know then; but I have no doubt he has long forgotten; it is not the sort of thing that would stick in his memory for one moment.'

'Oh!' and turning over a leaf or two of vol. i. as she speaks, 'what sort of a thing is it? What is it about? The "subject of all work," I suppose?'

Miss Jocelyn's temperature has not been low throughout the dialogue, judging by the colour of her face, but at this direct interpellation it goes up with a run.

'I know you will laugh at me,' she says—'it will not be for the first time—but I thought—I dare say I was mistaken—that I had an idea that was rather new upon the way of treating the passions in fiction—I mean,' a slight streak of importance piercing through the shyness of her voice, 'their interaction upon each other.'

'Good Lord!' after a slight pause; 'and may I ask which of the passions you have made interact? The passions in a woman's mouth generally mean one! Is it the usual one?'

'If I answer'—in a tone where mortification and compressed laughter strive for the upperhand—'you will probably say "Good Lord!" again.'

'I probably shall! *The interaction of the passions!* Good——' She breaks off midway in the obnoxious ejaculation. 'Where did you get hold of such a phrase, and who has been giving you lessons in the subject?'

'In what subject?'

'The interaction of the——'

'Oh, do not repeat it in that staring voice!' cries Emma, bursting into vexed mirth; 'you could make the first ten lines of "Paradise Lost" ridiculous if you repeated them in that key.'

Mrs. Chantry complies with her niece's request in so far that she does not reiterate her question either in the same or varied words, but it is doubtful whether the course

she takes is much more agreeable to Emma's feelings. She settles herself deliberately in her chair, and, turning to page 1, begins to read with the evident intention of seriously tackling the work of genius so unexpectedly sprung upon her. Her sarcastic lips are shut tight, and there is a flush of annoyed feeling not much inferior to her young companion's on her cheek-bones.

'You are not going to have the inhumanity to read it *here*—*now*—under my nose?' cries the girl, in most unvarnished dismay, as the certainty of having at least one reader breaks upon her.

'I undoubtedly am!' replies her aunt firmly; 'you meant it to be read, did not you? and you will be able—to begin with—to judge of the effect that the—I believe you had rather I would not repeat the expression—has upon me.'

A half-hour that can scarcely be said to be enjoyed by Miss Jocelyn follows. She would like to leave the room, but is detained by a gnawing anxiety as to the effect produced by her beloved offspring upon absolutely the

first person submitted to its charm, to learn the impression made by her child upon one to whom she has ever since she could remember stood in that relation. Surely, as Mrs. Chantry reads she will hear some involuntary cry of grandmotherly fondness and admiration over the bantling burst from her. But she waits in vain. No such cry comes. Her aunt's eyes travel steadily down one page after another. Her fingers turn the leaves methodically; but no sound of either appro- or disappro-bation escapes her. Every now and then her eyebrows go up nearly into her hair. The half-hour extends itself to three-quarters, then to an hour, and still the pages turn in continual silence. At least the reader is not skipping, nor has she once yawned. These at least are favourable omens, but, oh, how welcome a few, or even one, less negative would be! The dressing-bell rings, and still she reads. At last she looks up; but her eyes turn to the clock and not towards her niece. Then she rises, and keeping her fore-finger still in the volume, gathers up the other two, and

saying, in a cold voice, 'You had better go to dress: Tom and Lesbia and the Hatchesons are coming to dinner,' prepares to leave the room. But this is more than human nature, or, at least, the little piece of it made up into Emma Jocelyn, can bear.

'You are not going without saying one word about it?'

The elder woman pauses, her hand on the door-handle.

'What would you have me say?' she asks, in a tone made up of annoyance and wonder; 'that I think it a pretty story for a girl of twenty-three to have written? You must' —a tinge of vexed and unwilling amusement in her voice—'give me time to get used to the idea that I have been warming a volcano in my bosom!'

'Your metaphor is as bad and mixed as Lord Castlereagh's "Ministers ought not to stand by like crocodiles, with their hands in their breeches pockets"!' retorts Emma, trying to laugh, but her eyes are full of bitter tears.

CHAPTER II.

TOM and Lesbia Heathcote have not had a very pleasant five-mile drive from their Jacobean door to Mrs. Chantry's castellated one, as they have quarrelled almost the whole way. Tom had not wished to come, and is cross with his wife for having, as he expressed himself, 'let him in for it.'

'Why, in Heaven's name, should we drive five miles on a wet night to dine—by-the-bye that last cook of your cousin's was a real poisoner!—Oh, they have sacked her, have they? Thank God at least for that—to dine with people whom we see every day of our lives!'

'I do not know how you can say that you

see them every day of your life, when you are never out of London, or off those horrid "Boards."'

'I do not know where your finery would come from if it were not for those "horrid Boards;" but at all events *you* see them every day of your life.'

'Why shouldn't I? If I like people I cannot see too much of them; and I always thought that you were so fond of Emma.'

The last clause of this sentence is accompanied by a slight giggle, if such a word can be applied to a matron's mirth.

It always makes Tom angry when Lesbia alludes with that little laugh to his supposed fondness for Emma; it has several times given him a pang of doubt as to whether Emma—(the bravest of us does not enjoy having our defeats noised abroad)—but no, Lesbia has not the slightest idea why her husband dislikes being rallied about her second cousin; but she is perfectly aware of the fact, and it is only when she is feeling cross herself that she lays hold of what experience has taught her to be an unfailing

weapon of exasperation. Nor has it failed now.

'I can like people reasonably,' retorts he, 'without continually wearing out my own shoe-leather and their patience by always running after them to tell them so.'

A conversation carried on in this way, with equal courage and spirit on both parts, entails a good deal of smoothing of brows when the brougham stops and the footman opens the door. In Lesbia's case this is done in an instant, since with the best will in the world she has never been able to remain in an ill-humour for more than a quarter of an hour at a time, and it is with a perfectly friendly voice that she cries :

'Here already ? How the time has flown ! I declare we will always quarrel when we go out to dine !'

Her good-humour is further heightened by the sight of more opera-cloaks in the hall than she had expected. Her husband, following her with a fagged body, and a spirit still tingling from the pin-pricks which she herself has so instantaneously forgotten, is

slower to recover his blandness. His hostess's first words, spoken with a lowered voice, which the buzz of fourteen or fifteen talkers renders almost needless, do not tend to sweeten him further.

'I have done such an idiotic thing. I entirely forgot one man; some people asked whether they might bring him, and I said "Oh yes, delighted;" and then he went clean out of my head, and now the table has to be relaid, and the whole thing rearranged. I hope you are not hungry.'

'I have not seen food since 4.30,' replies Tom with suave reassurance; but at his tone, harried as she is, the twinkle never long absent from it sparkles in Mrs. Chantry's steel-gray eye.

'Begin upon Lesbia, she looks like a sweetmeat. Ah! here is Emma at last; not that there is any hurry, unfortunately, for I am sure it will be quite ten minutes before we sit down.'

To one so well acquainted with Miss Jocelyn as her cousin Mrs. Heathcote, the cause of her lateness is at once apparent,

though none of the dozen collected neighbours, to whom she is paying her pretty well-bred civilities, suspect it.

'You have been crying,' says she, as the course of the girl's greetings brings Emma into her neighbourhood. 'What have you been crying about?' But the person addressed attempts no answer to the question.

'I find,' she says, 'that I have just been shaking hands warmly with a person I never saw before—a man. Who is he? Where does he come from?'

'I have not an idea; I meant to ask you.'

'You did not bring him, then? He did not come with you?'

'No,' laughing, 'it would have been better for us if he had; he would have been a check upon our squabbling!'

Emma laughs too, though her cheek-bones are still red from the cold water that has washed away her tears.

'I knew that he could not be one of your sparks.'

'And why, pray, might not he be one of my sparks, as you coarsely call them?'

To the surprise of her cousin Emma gives a sort of start.

'Coarsely!' she repeats in a distressed voice; 'does it strike you that I have a coarse way of looking at things?' Then, seeing Lesbia's stare of astonishment, she returns hastily to the original subject. 'Does he look as if he belonged to the Hatchesons?'

'Possibly.'

'Is he a new mud student?'

'He is not the cut of a mud student.'

'Is he a friend of Mr. Small?'

Lesbia shakes her head decisively.

'Certainly not! Curates' friends are always other curates, and this man is obviously lay.'

Miss Jocelyn is hindered from contesting the somewhat illiberal generality of this assertion at this point by the announcement of dinner. A minute later, the guests being sent off in eager pairs to their delayed repast, Emma sees her aunt approaching her with the object of her late conjectures, and mumbling something which may do duty for a name, and which proves to the girl that Mrs. Chantry is quite as much in the dark

as to his identity as herself, presents him as her escort. She rises, smiling graciously and prettily, and he smiles too, perhaps involuntarily at the extraordinary garbling of his name; so they go off smiling together. It is well to begin an acquaintance with two smiles, but for its pursuance a little more is needed. To meet absolutely in space, with no background, no foreground, no point de départ! Her heart sinks a little at the prospect before her. How much easier it would be if society were laid on simpler lines, if she might begin her uphill task by putting him through a Shorter Catechism.

'Who are you? What are you? Where do you come from? What do you do for your living? What do you like? What do you hate? Is there any weak spot in your history or your family that you can warn me off?'

These thoughts have scarcely rushed through her mind when she finds her stranger—rather to her surprise, for she had not expected him to take the initiative—addressing her.

'Have you any idea at which side we are? I cannot catch sight of my name.'

Emma thinks that it would be very odd if he could, but having spied her own, and a blank next it, they sit down.

'What a blessing it was when the fashion came for having one's place determined, and one's mind made up for one!'

'Yes; but' (with an involuntary allusion to his youthful air) 'you can scarcely remember its introduction?'

'No; but my mother can.'

This is something gained. He has a mother! She is alive! If she were not, he would have said 'could' instead of 'can.'

'It made its way very slowly; at least, so my aunt, Mrs. Chantry, says. A good many people will not adopt it even now; they think it like a table d'hôte.'

'Yes, that is true; my grandmother feels like that.'

(Bravo! he has a grandmother!)

'I have often blessed its guiding light when I have been in doubt as to my neighbour's identity,' he goes on, with apparently

no suspicion that such is exactly his own present neighbour's case.

Emma is so occupied in wondering whether it would be possible to take him into her confidence on this point without impoliteness, that she forgets that the ball lies with her.

'Talking to a person when you do not know who he is, is like talking with your eyes shut; and I never can understand how a conversation between two blind people can be carried on.'

The perfectly general character of this last remark throws no light on the history of its utterer. She wishes that he had kept to his grandmother.

'It would be baffling, certainly, not to be able to see whether one's strokes told; like fighting a duel in the dark. Every conversation is a species of duel, I suppose.'

Here is a generality in no degree inferior in generalness to his. At this rate they will never get on a step farther. Both eat their soup in silence for a moment or two, then:

'The features are differently distributed in the case of different people,' he says.

'In some the mouth talks most; in many of course the eyes; and in one or two instances I have known the nose' (smiling) 'play quite a prominent rôle.'

(Does his grandmother's nose talk?)

She looks involuntarily at him, as if to verify the truth of his theory in his own case, and finds the same motive guiding him to the same action in the case of hers, and at their reciprocal detection both break into a slight laugh. Whatever the result of his voyage of discovery, hers resolves itself into the two facts that he looks more awake and alive than either of the mud students—two young gentlemen who are pursuing the study of agriculture under a gentleman farmer of the neighbourhood—and that his tie is scandalously inferior to theirs. No doubt can exist as to the fact of his tie being all wrong. She glances at Tom's to be quite sure. Yes, it is execrably tied. He is no gilded youth—so much is plain. If he is not a gentleman he must have come with the Hatchesons. But no sooner is this charitable syllogism formulated in her mind than a sense of shame

at the fatuity of judging a man by his necktie rushes over her, and a whimsical recollection of Yorick demonstrating the necessity of a First Cause, and interrupted by young Comte de Fainéant to be told that his 'solitaire' ought to be 'plus badinant,' flashes into her memory.

'The conversation of the blind!' pursues the young stranger, in happy ignorance of her opinion of his toilet; 'it would not be a bad subject for an essay.'

'No, rather good. It reminds one of Hazlitt's titles.'

'If one could manage to catch a little of his spirit with his letter!' (laughing)—'that is so likely, is not it? But it really might not make a bad article — "The Conversation of the Blind." I shall go home and write it to-night.'

'Do you write?'

Here is a personal indication at last. But the satisfaction of overtaking it is drowned in the far deeper interest of recognising a fellow-sinner, a denizen of that literary world over whose agitating border she her-

3

self has just set the toe of one trembling shoe.

'I ink a good deal of paper.'

Again the desire for a directer mode of intercourse between man and man than our height of culture allows seizes Miss Jocelyn. If she might but say, 'Tell me your name, and I will tell you whether I have ever heard of you as a writer!'

While thinking thus her lips frame nothing but the not very happy response:

'You do not say so!'

'You are evidently not one of my readers,' says the young man, laughing, and yet, perhaps, with a very little bit of pique in his tone. 'But why should you be so astonished at my writing?'

'I am not in the least astonished,' returns she, with the real distress of a habitually well-mannered person who has committed an incivility. 'How stupid of me to convey such a notion! You know what an intricate thing a chain of ideas is, and I will not bore you by showing you all the tiresome links that led up to my silly ejaculation!'

'I work chiefly like a mole, underground; so it is not at all odd that you have never heard of me,' says the stranger good-humouredly.

'But you come to the surface now and then,' returns she, with a pleasant smile, which she feels to be dishonest, since it tries to convey that she is perfectly acquainted with the occasions on which he has emerged.

'I am on the *Epoch!* You have heard of the *Epoch?*'

Not to have heard of the *Epoch* is akin to not having heard of the Lord Mayor or the House of Commons, and she winces.

'Yes; I have heard of the *Epoch.*'

'I brought out a little volume of Essays last year. I thought you might perhaps have come across them.'

The hurt vanity of a young author strikes in her a chord of such acute sympathy that she hovers on the verge of a falsehood. Shall she, by merely a motion of the head, indicate that she is acquainted with the little volume? But veracity prevails. Her head remains still, and her face blank.

'It is obvious that you have never even heard of them!' cries he, with a now frankly vexed laugh. 'What a drastic remedy for one's vanity a Saturday to Monday in the country is!'

She reddens, partly in distress at having hurt his feelings, partly stung by his tone.

'We *do* read in the country sometimes too,' replies she quietly.

'Only not my "Warp and Woof"!' interrupts he, with another laugh of a less disagreeable and even apologetic character. 'Well, I dare say you are not much the——'

But in her turn she interrupts.

'"Warp and Woof"!' cries she, in an excited voice, and with a new and brighter rush of carnation to her cheeks. 'You do not mean to say that you wrote "Warp and Woof"?'

'Yes, I did.'

'You wrote the "Fools of Fiction"?'

'Yes.'

'And the "Illiberality of the Liberals"?'

'Yes.'

'And the one on the "Melancholy of Antonio"?'

'Yes.'

'And the "Threadbare Tribute to Charles Lamb"?'

'Yes.'

Her eyes—he had no notion that they were so bright—are sparkling like water in a windy sunshine.

'Not know "Warp and Woof"! Never have heard of "Warp and Woof"! Why, there are some of them that I can say by heart! Why, I have bought them! I have read them—I have studied them! And are you really serious in saying that *you* wrote them?'

'Undoubtedly I did. But why does that surprise you? They were not anonymous—my name was on the title-page.'

'Was it?'

'My name — Edgar Hatcheson — was printed as large as life on the title-page.'

'Then you are related to these Hatchesons?—to'—correcting herself—'to Mr. and Mrs. Hatcheson?' her eye glancing involuntarily

towards the couple who not very long ago settled in the neighbourhood, with the reputation of having made their too obvious money in 'the Colonies'; figuring almost invariably in their acquaintances' speech as 'those dreadful Hatchesons.'

'I am their nephew.'

'Nephew to Mrs. Hatcheson?' repeats Emma in a tone of whose shocked wonder she herself is but slightly aware.

'I am *Mr.* Hatcheson's nephew,' in rather quick correction.

Miss Jocelyn is sensible of a slight feeling of relief. The little silent, humble husband is decidedly less offensive than the big and fulsome wife. But that the writer of the delightful essays of whose combined delicacy and brilliance the public has shown its appreciation by sending them racing through half a dozen editions in as many months—a writer whom it has seemed a hope too bright to be realized that she should ever meet—that this writer turns out to be the near relative of the social Bugaboos whom for the same six months she has been trying

in London and the country to dodge! The thought is too grotesque to be realized! It takes away her breath; yet she must make some comment.

'Of course,' she murmurs, 'the name is the same—I ought to have connected the two ideas! I can't think why I did not! It is not at all a common name either,' she adds politely.

'Less common than Hutchinson, or more so, do you think?' he asks in a voice of mixed gratification and annoyance, the first produced undoubtedly by her ecstasy over his work, the second by her stupefaction at his kindred.

'Oh, certainly less common!' Then, hurrying away from the distasteful topic to a more agreeable one: 'And so I am really talking to the author of "Warp and Woof"! How often I have wondered whether I ever should have that good-fortune! There are so many questions I have wanted to put to you!—so many things I have wished to ask!'—turning a pair of respectful, eager eyes full upon him in an extremely gratifying

manner. 'Where do you get your snatches of out-of-the-way verse from?—quotations that set one hunting for days? Where does "Blind Orion hungry for the morn" come from?'

'That is not very out-of-the-way.'

'Is not it? I searched almost all through Milton for it. I thought it had a Miltonic cadence.' She makes use of this last phrase with a certain self-satisfaction.

'It was no use searching Milton for what belongs to "bright Keats,"' replies he a little bluntly.

'Keats! How dull of me not to have thought of him! And now'—smiling—'to avenge myself on you for showing up my ignorance, I shall make my one criticism on your book. I do not care about the title; it is poor and banal, and gives no indication'—with another flattering eye-beam—'of the riches within.'

He laughs.

'Your shot glances aside. I am innocent of "Warp and Woof." My sister chose it.'

Earlier in the dinner Emma would have

been thankful for this new figure to add to her gallery; but her discovery of the young writer's connection with the Hatchesons robs her of all desire to press further into a domestic circle probably so deeply objectionable. Doubtless his grandmother, mother, and sister are well worthy of his uncle and aunt.

'Your sister? Oh, indeed! And does she write, too?'

'Thank heaven—no!'

He makes this last response with such a fervour of gratitude that his neighbour flushes violently; then, recollecting that it is impossible he can intend any personal application in his entire ignorance of her literary achievement, she asks with as much indifference as she can assume:

'Why do you say, "Thank heaven—no"?'

'Oh, do not you know that two of a trade never agree? And as things now stand, my sister and I agree uncommonly well; and, besides'—a little cynically—'is not it enough to have *one* member of a family bound to regard the whole of creation as "copy"?'

'Is that the way that you were looking at creation when you wrote "Warp and Woof"?' asks Emma, in a tone of such profound disappointment as startles the young man. 'How glad I am that I did not know it earlier! I wish you had not told me now.' There is a moment of rather awkward silence. Then, 'Do you disapprove of *all* women writing?' asks Miss Jocelyn, in a rather stifled voice, which seems to herself halfway towards the betrayal of her gigantic secret, but evidently conveys no glimpse of it to her hearer.

'Did I say that **I** disapproved of any woman's writing?'

'You implied it.'

'If I did it would have to be under my breath, for majorities are always right, and it is very rare nowadays to meet a lady who has not aired her opinions in print.'

'Aired her opinions!' repeats Emma indignantly. 'Why, the very shape of the phrase is contemptuous! Why should not you say simply written, as you would in the case of a man?'

'I am perfectly willing to say simply written.'

Another slight pause, again broken by Miss Jocelyn, who is unable to resist dallying with the delightful danger of discovery.

'You say that it is very rare to meet a lady who has not written? Well, when you look round this table, how many would you suspect of having penned anything more contraband than invitations to dinner or household accounts?'

His eye—a very bright one—in obedience to her challenge travels round the circle of diners—Mrs. Chantry's is a round table—and then returns gravely to her face.

'I can only answer for my uncle's wife.'

She remarks that he does not call her his aunt.

'And I can answer for *my* aunt!' cries she gaily, 'and for my cousin,' with a slight motion of the head in the direction of Lesbia.

'The lady in green is your cousin?'

'Yes; and that is her husband,' indicating Tom with the precipitation with which one

points out one's relatives to a stranger who might otherwise ignorantly revile them. 'I can answer for my cousin, for your neighbour' (lowering her voice a little), 'for Tom Heathcote—in fact, there is not one of them —not one of *us*'—correcting herself, with a perfectly superfluous fear of detection—'that I cannot answer for.'

She has snatched a rapid glance at him to see whether he has noticed her change of pronoun; but it has evidently—rather to her disappointment, though she would have been greatly embarrassed if he had commented on it—passed perfectly unobserved.

'Perhaps, then, I am generalizing unjustifiably from the high-pressure South Kensington ladies among whom my lines are cast.'

'You live in South Kensington?' with that air of fresh and respectful interest which he had before found so agreeable. It is obviously perfectly genuine. The manners and customs of the author of the 'Threadbare Tribute to Charles Lamb' are evidently looked upon as matters of such

grave importance by this neighbour of his that the consciousness produces in that author, though naturally and habitually unshy, a sort of amused and titillated shyness.

'I live in a place that I think I may safely aver you never heard of.'

'No?'

'I was told the other day of a Colonial Secretary who kept a globe at his office, and when any inconvenient question was put to him about any place in his department, he always answered: "It is not on my globe." I am sure that Tregunter Road is not on your globe.'

'Tregunter Road!' (slowly). 'No; I do not think that I know it'; then, with an accent of even more earnest interest, 'Did you write "Warp and Woof" in Tregunter Road?'

'I believe that it has the honour of being the birthplace of two or three of those masterpieces,' he answers lightly, feeling that, pleasant as is the sensation of her almost awed admiration, he has no business to allow

her to take him quite so seriously. She mistakes the meaning of his dubious look.

'I feel that my questions sound impertinent,' she says anxiously; 'but if you knew how deeply, *deeply* interested I am in hearing how really good work is produced, you would forgive me.'

He laughs, embarrassed at the pedestal to which she has lifted him.

'I pray you, do not mock me, fellow-student! I have a bad habit of——'

But agreeable as it would be to accuse himself of bad habits in which she would certainly not believe to this ideal listener, Mr. Hatcheson is not, on this occasion, to have the opportunity of doing so. Her attention, lately so flatteringly centred upon him, is at this point distracted by a very audible aside from the old butler, whom the stranger cannot help overhearing administering this exhortation, 'A little more conversation to the right, Miss Emma!'

The young people's eyes meet, his full of astonishment, hers brimming over with laughter.

'He has been with my aunt since before her marriage!' she says in explanation; 'he always exercises a surveillance over my conduct when we give a dinner, and it is as much as my place is worth to disobey him!'

CHAPTER III.

'WELL, did you find out who he is?' asks Lesbia, after dinner, when her cousin, having amply fulfilled her sub-hostess duty of setting the female guests talking in pairs, is able at length to obey the impatient becks and nods with which Mrs. Heathcote has been inviting her to shirk her obligations.

'Did I not?' returns Emma, her eyes beginning to scintillate with the consciousness of the magnitude of her discovery; 'just guess!'

'*Guess!* is he anybody guessable? Did I ever hear of him before?'

'I should rather think that you have! He is'—speaking very slowly so as the longer to enjoy the effect of her communication—'he

is *the* Hatcheson—the Hatcheson who wrote "Warp and Woof"!'

'"Warp and Woof"!' repeats Lesbia, with a rather puzzled air, and with none of the enraptured illumination on which Miss Jocelyn had reckoned;—'was that the story where the man pushed his wife over the precipice on their honeymoon, and afterwards carried her all over Europe packed up as a piano?'

'Good heavens, no!' cries Emma, in an astonished and disgusted voice; 'you must be confounding it with some dreadful Shilling Shocker! "Warp and Woof" is that volume of exquisite essays which there was such a chorus of praise over last year; I read one or two of the best'—reproachfully—'aloud to you, and you *said* you liked them!'

'Oh, so I did! I remember now. What a stupid mistake! "Weal and Woe" was the title of another book. Mr. McDougall left it behind him on his last visit to us.'

Emma is silent. She has always known that Lesbia's literary tastes were few and

evil; but this last proof of the fact seems to open an abyss such as never before yawned between them.

'And now tell me—and make haste'—(lowering her voice)—'what were you crying about before dinner? what can you have to cry about?'

In perfect innocence, Mrs. Heathcote has hit upon the one topic which could erase the guilt of her monstrous blunder from her companion's mind. The corners of Emma's mouth—corners agreeably sunk in her fresh cheeks—begin to droop.

'My books have come!—my "Miching Mallechos"! Six of them!'

'And you cried over that!' cries Lesbia in a key of high astonishment. 'Do they look disappointing? Are not they nicely got up?'

'Nothing could be nicer!'—with an accent of deep dejection—'good type and paper, and pretty cretonne binding.'

'Then why did you cry?'

'Aunt Chantry came up to my turret room—she does not do such a thing once in a

fortnight—just as I was unpacking them. You know how anxious I was not to tell her my secret till I saw whether the book was going to be a success!'

'It is sure to be a success!'

Though Lesbia has not read the work in question, and though Miss Jocelyn is well aware of the worth of her literary opinion, she feels vaguely cheered by the warmth of this assurance.

'She began by mocking at the title.'

'H'm! Well, you know, *I* boggled a good deal at that. It is too late to change it, I suppose?'

'I would not change it for worlds!' (hastily). 'And she sat down resolutely to read it then and there—I can't tell you how nervous that made me!—and, as she read, I saw by the look on her face—the look she always puts on when she is vexed—that she did not like it, and as she left the room she made a remark—I really can't bear to repeat it!—which showed that she thought it extremely coarse! I *was* so shocked!'

'Coarse!' repeats Lesbia, with a look first

of stupefaction and then of intense amusement. '*You* write a coarse book! The world must be turning topsy-turvy! Well' (brazenly, but consolingly), 'at least, it is better than being dull. Can you' (eagerly) 'lend it me? Can I take it home to-night?'

'I have six copies' (mournfully). 'I always meant to give you one; but, if it is coarse, I dare say Tom would rather that you did not read it.'

Mrs. Heathcote's sole answer to this suggestion is a pregnant chuckle.

'I do not think,' continues Emma earnestly —'I am sure I do not want to palter with right and wrong—but I do not think that anyone has a right to accuse one of being coarse because one tries to deal sincerely with the main factors of human existence, to paint life and passion as God made them, and not in the mask and domino that convention has figged them out in.'

'Is that a bit out of "Miching Mallecho"? It sounds rather "tall." Well, I *must* have a copy. I dare say' (reassuringly) 'that Aunt Chantry will like it better as it goes on.'

'On the contrary, she will like it still worse. The passion naturally grows more intense as the story develops.'

'I *must* take it home to-night with me. I shall not sleep till I have read every word of it. And,' with an air of determination, 'I will make Tom read it, too.'

A doubt crosses Miss Jocelyn's mind as to whether its compulsory perusal will very much add to the popularity of her novel; but before she can express it, Lesbia has sprung to another subject.

'How are you going to amuse all these stodgy people to-night? If Mr. McDougall had been here, we might have had some automatic writing or some thought-reading.'

'But' (rather dryly) 'Mr. McDougall is *not* here.'

'I cannot tell you what extraordinary things he *willed* me to do on the last night of his visit.'

'H'm!'

'Not by pressure of any kind—he did not even touch me—merely by the power of the eye, apparently.'

'H'm!'

'One of the things he willed me to do was to go up to Tom, who was sitting in his arm-chair, reading, or pretending to read, just to show his contempt for the whole thing, snatch his pince-nez out of his hand, and put it on Mr. McDougall's own nose.'

'H'm!'

'Why do you go on saying "H'm"? You surely must think it very curious!'

'Extremely curious!' dryly still, but absently, too, for her ear has caught a snatch of the conversation being carried on between Mrs. Hatcheson and her aunt, to whom, as is the happy fate of all good hostesses, the entertainment of the least attractive among the guests has inevitably fallen.

'I can't tell you how much Mr. H. and I have been looking forward to introducing our young gentleman to you,' the visitor is saying in an affectionate, loud colonial voice. 'I am sure I have not a word to say against any of our neighbours. I am sure no family ever had a warmer welcome' (this is not strictly in accordance with fact). 'But you

will not mind my saying that in our little circle there is not a household that is to be named in the same breath with Chantry Castle.'

'You are very good to say so,' with a civil smile, whose quality of almost tragic boredom is apparent only to her niece.

'And, though he *is* my nephew' ('He was less eager to insist on the relationship,' is the listener's thought), 'I must say that he is an uncommonly brilliant young fellow.'

'Indeed!'

'He is an Oxford man, you know.'

'Yes?'

'And they thought an immense deal of him there. He took the "Ireland" and the "Craven," and everything else he could take.'

'Indeed! And,' trying to bury a yawn among the feathers of her fan, 'is he at Oxford still?'

'Oh no; he left a couple of years ago. Now he—— Well, he *writes*,' with an apologetic intonation over the confession, and hastily adding, 'only for his amusement, of course.'

Emma smiles to herself at the discrepancy between this statement and the version that had been given her by the young writer himself—when her old tyrant, the butler, had at length allowed her to restore her attention to him—of the cause and scope of his literary labours, from which it was evident that 'Warp and Woof,' if it had seated its writer among the immortals, had also ignobly boiled the pot! Her smile dies away as she hears her aunt return in a voice of gloomy ire:

'*Who does not write now?*'

Her tone is so surcharged with fierce meaning that Emma is seized by a sudden panic that Mrs. Chantry is, in the slang of the day, about to 'give her away,' to discharge the secret with which her bosom is evidently labouring into the large and obsequious ear so conveniently near her, to cast the pearls of Miss Jocelyn's genius before this most unworthy swine! The idea frightens her so much that she starts up, and, leaving Lesbia, who has apparently been meanwhile retailing fresh proofs of Mr. McDougall's will-power to a perfectly in-

attentive hearer, crying out in triumph: 'Ah, you run away! You are half convinced already! You will be a convert before long!' she approaches the two ladies, who occupy unequal portions—for Mrs. Hatcheson has affectionately encroached—of the Empire sofa by the fire. She reaches them just in time to catch the visitor's rejoinder to the hostess's last question, of whose withering import she is quite unconscious.

'Yes, indeed, writing has become quite an aristocratic freak!'

And her aunt's dry retort: 'I do not think there is anything very aristocratic about it! Our kitchens and sculleries rush into print quite as freely as our palaces!'

Emma trembles. She cannot be said to belong to either of the categories scathed by the speaker; but is this only a dreadful exordium, a way of leading up to the revealing of her mystery? Is she only just in time to prevent it? or is she, indeed, in time? On the latter point she is soon reassured.

'Oh, Miss Jocelyn, I am almost inclined to scold you! What for?—why, for leaving that ottoman. You do not know what a graceful group you and Mrs. Heathcote made.'

'Indeed!'

'But then—if you do not mind my saying so—you do always fall into the happiest poses. I am always saying to my young ladies, "Why can't you sit and stand and walk as Miss Jocelyn does? It seems to come quite easy to her. Why does not it come easy to you?" I am sure they ought to be sick of the sound of your name.'

Emma can only murmur an indistinct disclaimer of her own consummate grace:

'But, indeed, we are all one as bad as another. To-day my nephew—he is so droll—said: "I impose a forfeit upon the next person who mentions Miss Jocelyn!"

The moment is perhaps not the most favourable one for the hero of this anecdote to present himself; but as the men are re-entering the room, it is a natural impulse

that directs his steps towards the only lady in it, except his aunt, with whom he has any acquaintance. But that lady eludes him. She has no desire to see her aunt's critical eye fall upon his erroneous neck-tie and faulty shirt-front, nor to hear Mrs. Hatcheson loudly call to him, as she presently does, for corroboration of the frequency with which Miss Jocelyn's name figures in the Hatcheson table-talk. In her retreat she is intercepted by Tom Heathcote.

'One can never get hold of you at these functions!' he says, in a grumbling voice that yet shows the mollifying influence of the old madeira and the new cordon bleu; 'I wanted to speak to you to give you a hint.'

'I am not fond of hints' (smiling); 'and I am quite sure you would not be good at giving them.'

'I wanted to give you a hint about Lesbia.'

'Yes,' with a slight raising of the eyebrows. 'If she proposes getting up any of that ridiculous hocus-pocus that she has gone

in for lately, here to-night, do not encourage her. Has she suggested it?'

'No-o.'

'You do not know to what an extent it has got hold of her; the whole house is littered with sheets of paper scrawled over by that idiotic automatic writing; I picked one up out of curiosity. You never read such gibberish in your life.'

'I do not think that you are a fair judge; most answers sound unmeaning if you have not heard the questions; but I think you are quite safe to-night. If we have spirits among us, they are very effectually materialized' (with a laughing glance in the direction of Mrs. Hatcheson).

'Ha! ha! yes! I find that that young fellow is her nephew.'

'His.'

'Well, his or hers, it does not make much odds! He looks a bit of a smug; but'—with a glance of comprehensive contempt at the young stranger's kindred—'what can you expect of a pig but a grunt?'

'A *smug* and a *pig!*' reddening. 'You

have pretty well demolished the poor man, and yet——' She stops. She was about to add in indignant defence, 'and yet in his own line he is extremely distinguished,' but the thought that the distinction is not of a kind to appeal to Tom Heathcote arrests her. The author of the 'Melancholy of Antonio' may remain a smug and a pig to her present companion for all she will do to prevent it.

'But to return to Lesbia.'

'Yes?'

From such an excursion Emma is nothing loath.

'You have not been much with us lately, or you would have seen how these infernal conjuring tricks have monopolized her.'

'I think,' smiling, 'that Lesbia's is too roving a mind to be ever monopolized by any one subject.'

'Ah, you have not been much with us lately!—why have not you?'

'I have been rather busy.'

Though Emma knows that her novel is, within the next twenty-four hours, to be

administered by main force to Mr. Heathcote, yet the idea that the disclosure of its existence may be hurried on by her confession of unusual occupation, and the questions it may draw forth, fills her with shy terror. Her alarms are groundless.

'She has taken up palmistry, too.'

'Indeed!'

'One scarcely ever sees her without a manual of palmistry in her hand.'

'No?'

'It makes her neglect all her duties.'

'*All?*'

'She scarcely ever sees the children.'

'Since when? the last time that I visited her I had to ask her to send them away; they were all blowing penny trumpets round her, so that I could not hear either her or myself speak, but she seemed to like it.'

'She is absolutely brutal to my grandfather.'

'Why, he adores her!'

'He *did;* but the other day she insisted on looking at his hand, and told him that his line of life broke off short! Poor old chap,

he did not half like it! At seventy-eight one does not enjoy these announcements.'

'That certainly'—laughing involuntarily—'was not very judicious.'

'I did not much relish it myself when she came to me, a week ago, to tell me—with tears in her eyes, I allow—that McDougall had been reading her hand, and that she is to be a widow at twenty-nine. I can tell you, if I had met McDougall just then, and if he had had a wife, I should have done my best to make *her* a widow!'

'He has not a wife, has he?'

'I do not know, and I do not want to know! I know nothing about him! You had better ask Lesbia.'

'I have rather a hankering after palmistry myself; there must be something in a belief that has outlived so many religions and philosophies. It is a fascinating thought that one's own hand,' looking longingly at her pink palm, 'holds the story of one's future, if one can only learn to read it! There are one or two questions I should not at all mind asking of fate.'

The destiny of 'Miching Mallecho' is the theme that is before Miss Jocelyn's mind's eye; but of this her companion is naturally ignorant.

'I can't think why *you* should wish to know the future. Of course, to a married woman'—bitterly—'there is the attraction of finding out how soon she will get rid of her clog! Well, I confess I did not expect *you* to uphold Lesbia! Et tu, Brute! You used to be my friend!'

Although Tom is extremely sensitive as to any suspicion that his wife is aware of his past relations with her cousin, he is not averse in after-dinner moments to an occasional allusion to the past, and it has sometimes crossed Emma's mind that Memory in his case must have been playing one of her knavish tricks, since there is no particular proof of friendship in refusing an offer of marriage from a man, which is the evidence of her affection that, six years ago, she had unhesitatingly given. It would be too delicate a task to set him right, but when he begins to allude in a sub-tender tone to their

imaginary past endearments she always goes away. She does so now; nodding her head friendlily, and saying:

'Well, set your mind at rest! We will have no "conjuring tricks" to-night!'

She is as good as her word. Just glancing in the direction of her aunt to see how she is getting on with the young author, and ascertaining with a slight pang that she has evidently not got on at all, since after this short interval they are separated by almost the whole width of the room, she makes her way to the vicar to proffer him his usual game of whist. The vicar is a good man, over whom his flock rejoice in troubling as being so much too good for a country parish, and only detained from the Whitechapel of his heart by the health of his one little sickly child, which cannot draw its precarious breath save in the wholesome rural air. But he is not quite a saint, or he would bear with a more perfect patience the one blister of his life, the determination of his curate, Mr. Small, to imitate him in the minutest particulars, even to taking a hand at whist,

for which he has neither natural nor acquired aptitude.

Miss Jocelyn just waits beside the whist-table long enough to see that in the cutting for partners the vicar escapes being saddled with his subordinate's trying blunders, and almost more trying apologies, and then leads the rest of the company off to the billiard-room for a game of pool. When it is finished the spirits of the party, and especially of Mrs. Heathcote, are so much raised that she challenges the liveliest of the mud students to engage with her in a pastime which consists in both being blindfolded, and in this condition his being set to pursue her, with the view of catching her, round the billiard-table. They take off their shoes and steal cautiously round. Each stands quite still to overhear the smallest movement made by the adversary, then both tear and rush and grab and lunge where no adversary is, the audience, strictly silent up to this point, breaking into delighted laughter.

'Did you ever see this intellectual game before?' asks Emma of young Hatcheson,

whom she finds herself alongside of before the rack in which both are replacing their cues.

'Never.'

'Does your tone mean that you do not care if you never see it again?'

'On the contrary, I was just thinking that, when the International Copyright has bought me a billiard-table and a few other luxuries, I will teach it to my sister, and we will play at it every night.'

'*Every* night! What a terrific idea! But yet, though you may not think it, it requires prac——'

Her voice is drowned in a perfect storm of applause, in which the most elderly of the ladies and gentlemen most vociferously join, and which is called forth by the fact of Lesbia beginning with a most unmatronly agility to climb on the billiard-table. The same idea at the same moment has seized her opponent. Both climb cautiously nearer and nearer each other, while the audience holds its breath. Mrs. Heathcote is within a hairbreadth of capture, when, her quick ear catching the

sound of her pursuer's agitated breathing, she drops suddenly off again on to the floor, and, though with great activity, and a total forgetfulness of his dress clothes, he rolls over and over along the table after her, and makes a prodigious grab at his escaped prey, it is just too late, and amid the plaudits of the company she escapes. Then they try crawling under the table, but generally make so much noise by hitting themselves against the legs, or their heads against the table itself, as to defeat their own object. At length, blowzed, breathless and weary, they leave off.

'I am in tatters!' cries Lesbia. 'Now, if you had had thought-reading, I should have gone home in a whole skin.' But she says it so cheerfully and with so little regret as not to arouse the ire of Tom.

'I have not asked you a tithe of the questions I wanted to put to you,' says Emma regretfully, as she sees the moment approaching when the author of 'Warp and Woof' is to march out of her life; 'nor told you,' earnestly, 'how very fortunate I think we were in securing you for this evening.'

She has absolutely forgotten how entirely without volition on her and her aunt's part had been the young author's appearance within their doors. The sentence is so obviously no 'phrase' that once again, and this time in a stronger degree than before, he feels the same sense of almost oppressive gratification that had assailed him at dinner. He has received plenty of compliments on his book, and has hitherto had no difficulty in swallowing them; but the incense which this charming white nymph, who looks at once so fresh and so high-bred—they do not by any means always go together—insists on burning on his paltry little altar seems to have got into his head. He feels it impossible to frame an answering speech which shall steer its way between the impertinence of compliment, the fatuity of acceptance, and the insincerity of disclaimer. He has to borrow from Shakespeare.

> 'Madam, you have bereft me of all words!'

he says respectfully.

'Edgardo!' strikes in a jarring note, as the

young man's aunt-in-law smites him a playful blow on the shoulder with her fan in passing. 'Edgardo, are you aware what time of night it is?'

She is gone in a moment, but she has taken with her her nephew's power of quoting poetry.

'I thought that your name was Edgar?'

'So it is.'

'But——'

'Do not ask me to explain,' with a laugh of ill-stifled vexation. 'To call me Edgardo is a mysterious pleasantry on the part of my uncle's wife, before which I bow without understanding it.'

CHAPTER IV.

'I AM sitting upon something hard,' says Tom Heathcote in a voice of angry suffering as he and his wife set off on their drive home in the brougham. 'What the deuce can it be?'

'Oh, I am so glad!' cries Lesbia joyfully.

'I do not know why you should be glad! What is it?'

'I was afraid that they had forgotten to put it in. It is Emma's novel.'

'*Emma's novel?*'

'Yes, *Emma's* novel! Why, you knew that she was writing one!'

'Did I?'

'Why, you lent her money to help her to have it published.'

'More fool I! so I did!'

'I wish we could get home a little faster! How slowly he is driving. I am dying to begin it! I shall not sleep till I have read every word!'

'Poor Emma! I should think it would keep till to-morrow.'

'It only arrived to-day, but Aunt Chantry somehow got hold of it, and dipped into it, and was very much shocked.'

'*Shocked?*'

'Yes, shocked. It is quite the most humorous idea I ever heard of; but it seems that Emma—Emma of all people—has written an improper novel.'

'I do not believe a word of it' (stoutly).

'Nor should I have believed it if she had not told me herself.'

'Told you that she had written an improper novel?' with indignant incredulity.

'Of course not in those words; but she told me that Aunt Chantry had made use of some very strong expression about it, which after all amounts to much the same thing.'

Tom is heard in the darkness of the

brougham to fidget uneasily, as if the news of his once love's literary indiscretion hurt his mind as much as the sharp edges and hard back of that indiscretion had already done his body.

'And I never think Aunt Chantry particularly straitlaced,' continues Lesbia, still inclined to treat the matter titteringly; 'while on the contrary I have always looked on Emma as rather a prude.' No answer. 'Whenever I have tried to tell her a risqué story——'

'More shame for you!'

'Oh, nothing at all bad, only a little piquant—she has always frozen up and stopped me; and now that she should have —oh, why does not Benson drive faster?'

The poor subject of this conjugal duet passes a very indifferent night. She takes her four 'Miching Mallechos' up to bed with her, less from parental tenderness than from a morbid fear that the mere fact of the number of copies may reveal her secret to the dusting housemaids. Mournfully, in the small hours of the autumn night, she turns the

pages in search of the poison which, according to her aunt, is so liberally spread there; mournfully, and yet now and then with a throb of elation when she happens upon some passage which shines upon her fond eye clad in indisputable purple. Once or twice it strikes her that more unlikely things have happened than that the author of 'Warp and Woof' should casually, attracted by the originality of its title or recommended by some friend, open 'Miching Mallecho,' and lighting upon some of these passages, give a start of delighted surprise at seeing this new planet in the sky of imagination 'swim into his ken.' Will he detect, as she herself with a flush of pleasure is doing in this vigil, the resemblance between her turns of expression, her audacities of thought and his own? When at length, about four o'clock in the morning, she creeps to bed, she falls into restless and contradictory dreams of being cut by her whole acquaintance, led by Mrs. Cave, the 'mauvaise langue' of the neighbourhood, for having written 'Miching Mallecho,' and at the same moment ap-

parently, of being the object of a tremendous ovation in the Albert Hall for having achieved that masterpiece. She wakes in the act of pushing away a crown of bays, which Edgar Hatcheson, with some slight confusion of ideas between the meeds of prose and poetry, is insisting on pressing round her brows.

There is not much foretaste of the Albert Hall glories in the expression of Mrs. Chantry's face as she enters the breakfast-room next morning, with her niece's three volumes under her arm.

'I return you your property!' she says in a rather alarming voice, laying them beside Emma's plate.

They sit down in unwonted silence; unwonted, for usually their tête-à-tête breakfast is one of the pleasantest half-hours in the day to two people sincerely attached to each other, and who yet, agreed to go each her several way, sometimes do not meet again till dinner. But Miss Jocelyn's love for her adopted mother, though warm and genuine, has never been quite without fear; and it is only with a good deal of whip and spur

applied to her courage that she at length forces herself to ask :

'Did you—were you able to—to—read much of—of it ?'

'I read it from cover to cover—every word of it !'

This at least is satisfactory, but the tone in which the statement is made so nearly resembles that of the child who with gloomy nausea announces that he has swallowed his prescribed jalap, that the young novelist is unable to draw much reassurance from it. She waits, with a beating heart, for some expression of opinion to follow ; but as none does, she hazards the inquiry :

'Did it strike you as having—do you think it has *any*—merit ?'

So modest a bid for praise must surely be followed by having some slight encomium knocked down to it.

'I am not enough of a critic to give an opinion as to its literary value,' with a slightly ironic emphasis ; 'and if I were, I was not dispassionate enough to judge it from that point of view ; my one feeling from the first

page to the last was'—the irony yielding to sincere and painful emotion—'was an earnest wish that anybody's child but mine had written it.'

Emma's bit of toast has dropped out of her shocked fingers on to the carpet, and like the immortal one of 'Rejected Addresses,' on the buttered side, without her perceiving its lapse.

'Why should you tamper with such a subject at all?' pursues Mrs. Chantry, her keen grey eyes beginning to flash with indignant annoyance. 'The relation of the sexes, in the cant of the day, is no doubt supposed to be the field of labour of most fiction; and if you must write a novel, which, I suppose'—with a vexed laugh—'nowadays "most every gurl expecks," and you had treated those relations within wholesome and legitimate limits, I should not have complained; but that without authority, without previous training, without—at least I hope without—experience——'

She breaks off, conscious, perhaps, that her sentence, if finished, may lead her to

plant a dart even more barbed than she intended in the breast of the rapidly reddening and paling girl before her. The cruelty of the slightly implied doubt as to her having drawn upon her own experience for the illegal ardour of 'Miching Mallecho' has sent every drop of her red young blood to the girl's face, and then drained it away again.

'You must know,' she says, in a low and not very steady voice, 'that it is the essence of imagination to be able to describe states of mind and conditions of feeling which it has not experienced.'

'But why you—you of all people'—(with a very perceptible increase of warmth)—'should think it necessary to deal with such an obscure and painful problem as hereditary vice——'

'If such problems exist'—in a firmer voice, but not without an inward quailing before the lightning of her companion's eye—'it is surely a want of courage to blink them; to refrain from throwing whatever small ray of light one can on such a momentous

subject, for fear of the paltry "Qu'en dira t'on?"'

Sincerely and ardently in earnest in her plea as Miss Jocelyn undoubtedly is, she cannot help a slight by-feeling of satisfaction in the turn of this last sentence, whose beauty of outline is, however, as becomes immediately apparent, entirely lost upon her auditor.

'I can't believe'—(with the sarcasm which from a child Emma has known as an integral part of her aunt, and yet has never grown quite comfortably used to)—'that the benefit—large as it will undoubtedly be—which society may derive from any ray of light you can cast on such a subject is at all likely to outbalance the moral deterioration to yourself.'

It is now the turn for Miss Jocelyn's blood to race back to her cheeks, and it is not slow to obey the whip of her interlocutor's stinging words. *Moral deterioration!* When the one burning hope that has guided her pen from opening to finish has been that of living in men's memories as a teacher and a benefactor to her kind!

'Out of whose paint-box'—pursues the relentless censor of 'Miching Mallecho'—'you got the colours with which you paint these headlong passions, I am at a loss to conjecture; for I am bound to say that there is a certain vividness about them. They do not read like second-hand!'

'I did not wish them to do so,' replies Emma, her parental feelings lending her the valour necessary to defend her assailed eaglet;—'I wished to supply my own total want of experience—*you* know—though just now you seemed to imply a doubt of it'—(with a burning blush of hurt modesty)—'how total that ignorance is—by imagination and intuition; I wished to draw as vigorous a picture as lay in my power of what has been the greatest motive force of human action from the beginning of time!'

She draws up her rather unfashionably long neck as she speaks, with an air of dignity so disproportioned, in her aunt's opinion, to the cause that has produced it, that her wrath, fierce as it is, yields to her ineradicable and in-season-out-of-season sense of a joke.

'You have indeed been successful!' she says, breaking into a laugh;—'but as I told you last night, you must give me time to grow used to my new dignity as aunt to Vesuvius! It beats Mrs. Nickleby's of niece to the Commissioner of Pavingstones hollow.'

After Mrs. Chantry has quitted her, Emma turns over in her mind whether she shall not loose the floodgates of her tears, but reflecting that since she had wept plentifully overnight there would be a certain superfluity in the indulgence; and reflecting further with just a touch of her aunt's cynicism that if she cries whenever Mrs. Chantry falls foul of 'Miching Mallecho' she will not have an eye left by Christmas, she abstains.

The day is Sunday; and the succession of ordinary Sunday events renders it even easier than would be the case on a week-day for the two occupants of Chantry Castle to avoid each other. It is an undoubted fact that affection for one's housemates should be in an inverse ratio to the size of one's house. In a palace two people may be comfortably indifferent; but in a cottage they *must* be

fond. Without having come into any further contact with her aunt than is involved in having sat beside her in church and opposite to her at luncheon, to which repast both have eagerly, and with the same motive of avoiding a tête-à-tête, invited Mr. Small, Emma reaches the afternoon. In the silence of her turret room it seems to stretch interminably before her; and in the turmoil of her spirit, her censor's words, 'moral deterioration,' 'aunt to Vesuvius,' seem to write themselves large, obscuring the text, on each page of the book and essay which in succession she tries to read. Though she cannot hope that they will vanish from her retina, they may perhaps appear in less monstrously sized print out of doors! But even upon the autumn flowers still holding out gallantly against the frost that bitter verdict seems inscribed; and as she strays disconsolately among them, a hungry desire to appeal against it to some second opinion grows strong within her. Mrs. Chantry's judgment is undoubtedly, as a rule, sound, and her instincts true; but in this case that

judgment is warped by prejudice; and her sympathies narrowed by the limitation of her education; the miserably inadequate female education of thirty years ago! If there were but some other mind to which she could appeal against the injustice of her aunt's sentence! But she scans her mental horizon in vain for a friendly sail. In this extreme infancy of 'Miching Mallecho,' who can already have read it? or, at all events, who can convey to her his or her opinion of it? There is one person indeed, Lesbia Heathcote, who has probably ere this devoured it; but Lesbia's estimate on a question of ethics would be scarcely more valuable than on a literary one. It is possible, however, that her husband may have glanced at it; and Tom, though without any intellectual pretensions—— Five minutes after having decided that Tom Heathcote has no intellectual pretensions Miss Jocelyn has called her dogs, and is walking swiftly in the direction of the home of that unconscious arbiter of her destiny.

By road the Heathcotes are five miles off;

but as the crow flies they are not more than three, and by taking a straight line across park and field, through intervening coverts, and over gate and hurdle, it is possible to reach them on foot in less than an hour. It is naturally the directer line which a person in Emma's heat and hurry of spirit is likely to take. What is the chance of a face scratched by hedge-briars, or ankles pricked by furze-spikes to one who has such an issue to have determined at the goal?

The day is one of autumn's best—warmly sunshiny, and pervaded by that misty, cobwebby, thoughtful stillness which is the exquisite appanage of the season at her fairest.

The trees—it is a flat well timbered region—look incredibly splendid through the thin shining vapour, whether it be the solitary royalty of oak or beach, or the daring grace of grouped cherry and maple and chestnut thrusting the happy audacity of their contrasts into each other's branches. Their beauty must take possession of the most preoccupied eye and mind, and as Emma

looks at them with a sort of stupefaction, it comes home to her what a feeble thing memory is! How weakly it carries the print of one burnished October on to another! It 'lacks retention' of the astonishing colours, gold and rust and copper, and downright flaming yellow, and ardent red and saffron, and green that snuffs out spring's!

The nimble sweetness of the air, the silent splendour around her, though incapable of distracting her thoughts for long from the inevitable channel, yet make those thoughts run more placidly along it. Her reflections take the consoling turn that all original writers have begun by meeting with opposition and contumely, that the most original, in fact, have had to make their own public, have had to wait to gain due hearing till they had formed an audience for themselves. She cannot, it is true, claim the parentage of the ideas which have excited her aunt's reprobation, but she is among the pioneers. She must take the penalty always attached to being in the vanguard—the fatigue of the

axe and pick, and the weariness of deferred recognition and reward.

These exalted consolations carry her to where, for the moment, her aunt's property ends, interrupted by an impertinent little tongue of woodland belonging to the Hatchesons, which runs up into it. By crossing that narrow strip she will find herself in ten minutes again on Mrs. Chantry's land, having saved herself a distance of half a mile.

The thought of the Hatchesons inevitably brings with it that of their nephew. Oh, if it were the author of 'Warp and Woof' in search of whose verdict she was speeding! If she could but meet him again, and, without betraying her acutely personal interest in the matter, extract from him his real opinion as to (not so much the main drift and scope of the story, upon which she feels a confidence of his entire sympathy and approbation), but as to whether there has been any unnecessary crudeness in the treatment of details; as to whether, most of all —and here is where the shoe pinches—there is any foundation, in fact, for Mrs. Chantry's

wounding accusation—here she reddens as brightly as the maple bough under which she is passing—of indelicacy!

She has scarcely set foot upon Hatcheson ground before one half at least of her wish is fulfilled, for, stretched along the mossed ground at a beech foot, with his hat beside him, as he stares up skywards through the jewel-bright leaf-roof over his head, she sees the essayist of her aspirations. The grass ride cut through the cover which she is following leads her directly past him; and as the little dogs' inquisitive yaps on discovering him make her approach less noiseless than it would otherwise have been, he is able to be on his feet, hatted and decorous, and advancing to meet her, before she reaches him.

'I am not trespassing,' she says, with her graceful smile, 'though it looks like it. I have been given leave.'

'And if you were trespassing, I am not a gamekeeper,' he answers; and the moment that the words are out of his mouth is displeased at their curtness.

'It is lucky for the dogs that you are not! Jim! Fritty! I had forgotten them. I was thinking of something else. You looked as if you were thinking, too.'

She smiles again, and a little wistfully, longing to ask him whether he has found the attitude of lying flat on his back, with the whites of his eyes turned up to heaven, to be the one in which the creative faculty is most active, the sap of the mind runs most freely.

'Looks are deceptive, I am afraid, for my mind was as nearly a blank as it was possible to be.'

'I should not think that that was a possibility very easily within reach of a mind like yours,' she returns, and with an air of such matter-of-fact simple deference that once again his overnight sense of confusion at the excess of her appreciation makes him hurry into a disclaimer.

'I assure you that it finds no difficulty at all. It is a condition which I succeed in reaching every fine Sunday when I can manage to get into the country.'

'I suppose,' she says slowly, 'that you—I mean that all hard and serious thinkers, knowing that the tension must be relaxed now and again, force your intellectual faculties to lie down to rest as deliberately as you would your bodies if you felt them growing exhausted.'

'Do we?' he answers, with a laugh, and making another effort to jump down from his pedestal; 'I cannot answer for Socrates and Bacon and Locke, but as far as I myself am concerned'—the raillery of his tone, polite and gentle as it is, causes her to redden—'I felt very small last night, I assure you,' he says, exchanging the light mockery of his tone for one of half indignant remonstrance, 'when I recalled with what persistent egotism I had talked of myself. You must not let me begin to sin again in the same way.'

For a moment she makes no rejoinder, but stands, shade and sunshine flecked, lightly brushing across the lips that are trembling with the eagerness of her inward emotion a little flaming cherry-bough that she had absently gathered in passing. Then:

'I, too, was ashamed of the way in which I catechized you,' she says; 'but my motive was not—was not——'

'Was not idle curiosity,' she is about to add, but stops; since what other motive can she assign without self-betrayal? There is nothing for it but to reframe her sentence.

'I did not know when I might have the chance of meeting you again' (it is impossible for the least coxcombical of men to miss the tone of unmistakable regret in which this doubt is uttered), 'and'—with a slight and serious smile—'long as my catechism seemed to you, I should have wished to make it longer still.'

'Yes?'

'I am like a child'—smiling again and deprecatingly—'who wants to pull his toy to pieces to see how it is made. I want to pull "Warp and Woof" to pieces to see how *it* was made; I want you to tell me—of course, supposing you do not dislike to do so—which of the essays took you most time and trouble to bring to its present pitch of polish? at what hour of the day they were written? and

even—you will laugh at this—with what sort of pen?'

'I cannot remember the pen, but I am afraid most of them were scratched off with a printer's devil waiting in the ante-room; and I am also afraid that to a less lenient eye than yours they show plain marks of their origin.'

'You do not say so?' with an accent of of stupefaction; 'and'—with an eagerness that makes her lose sight of the oddness which so persistent and minute an inquisitiveness as to his craft must wear to his unenlightened eyes—'did you find early morning or night the time when you were in greatest vein? I believe that few writers produce much in the afternoon.'

'How do you come to be so interested in the tricks of the trade?' he asks, laughing, and yet a little impatiently, too. 'Were you thinking of beginning author yourself?'

The question is asked in the lightest spirit of raillery, and with the sole notion of making her change the subject.

He has fled from printers' ink and its

associations into the heart of this bosky wood; and that the Dryad whom he meets there, and whose image had been the suavest among the sensuous impressions of delight that her present advent had interrupted should persist in smearing him with it, seems to him an anomaly not to be endured. That he should have to be continually raising her from the knees, upon which she as persistently insists on going down before him, seems to him—to do him justice—an anomaly more monstrous still. His bantering question has thrown her into a turmoil of spirit which he little suspects. What an opportunity! Here is the second opinion—and what an opinion! how different from poor Tom Heathcote's, for which she had craved! *here*, *now*, almost providentially as it would seem, set within her reach! Shall she—shall she not? Shall she? She is looking in his face with a piercingness of which she is unaware, trying to read on it whether he is worthy of the enormous confidence about to be reposed in him; and the momentous words, 'I have written a novel called

"Miching Mallecho,"' are hovering on her lips, when he speaks and puts them to flight. Seeing with surprise that she looks disturbed,

'I was only sub-jocose,' he says apologetically; 'I did not really credit you with anything so wanting in originality.'

There is such a fine flavour of liberal young contempt in his tone for all female authorship that 'Miching Mallecho' flies frightened back to the innermost recesses of its creator's being. She must depend upon Tom Heathcote after all!

CHAPTER V.

When the two illustrious authors leave the wood it is together. This came about by no parti-pris on either side; but simply that in the ardour of conversation his footsteps keep pace with hers for just a few yards—then for a few yards more till the topic in hand is finished; and then for just a few more, because another topic has been embarked upon.

It is as far from Miss Jocelyn's habits and tastes to ramble the country side in tête-à-tête with a young man, as it would be within her aunt's wishes that she should do so. But in this case the man is swallowed up in the Mind. Could even Mrs. Cave point the finger of scorn at her for treading the stubble

in company with an Intelligence? Not that she formulates to herself this delicate difference; but it is unconsciously yet reassuringly present to her.

They do not again approach the subject of female authorship; but each reciprocally extracts from and imparts to the other a good deal of personal detail. He informs her that he is a Cockney born and bred; and that he very much regrets the fact that he scarcely knows the cedar of Lebanon from the hyssop or the oak; or can discriminate the flight and song of one bird from another; that he was reading so hard while at Oxford as to have very little time for athletics; though, with a smile, he hoped he had not been quite a 'smug'—asking her, with another smile, whether she were acquainted with the word. The answering smile with which she replies in the affirmative is dashed with embarrassment at the recollection that the last time she had heard the obnoxious term, it had been applied to her innocent interlocutor. In return she confides to him her sighs for a more literary

milieu; whereupon he assures her that she would not like it if she had it. She, unconvinced, relates the particulars of her intellectual famine, and that the only house in the neighbourhood where any crumbs are ever thrown her to allay it is the one in the direction of which they are now walking; and into which the eccentric old lord, Tom's grandfather, occasionally imports from London some stray light of science, art, or letters, who finds him or herself strangely out of place among the habitués of the house. Upon his suggesting what a comfort and solace these errant luminaries must reap from her society, she assents with a simple matter-of-factness that rather amuses him.

Their reciprocal confidences cover so much ground that it is with a start of surprise that Emma perceives that they are close upon the high-road, into which, after her short cut, she emerges exactly opposite the Heathcotes' lodge. He has walked with her the whole way. Perhaps the sight of Tom Heathcote indistinctly perceived between the ironwork of the lodge gates talk-

ing to the lodge-keeper awakens or quickens her consciousness that her companion of three absorbing miles is an almost perfectly strange young man, and the nephew of 'those awful Hatchesons,' as well as a Mind.

She is, at all events, not left long in forgetfulness of the two former facts after having joined Tom Heathcote; to do which she has—a matter for some subsequent regrets—a good deal scamped her adieux. To the person parted from there has seemed nothing lacking to the pretty courtesy of her farewell, save the expression of a hope that it is not a final one.

'Who is your friend?' asks Tom, in a key of mild curiosity. Then, as she hesitates: 'Did not I see you talking to someone?'

'It was Mr. Hatcheson.'

'Good Heavens! I hope he is not coming here to worry my grandfather again about the ten acres! He has not the least intention of selling it him! The little cad supposes that his money——'

'It was not old Mr. Hatcheson'—conscience tears out this hasty yet reluctant

admission—'but his nephew—Mr. Edgar Hatcheson!'

'I did not know that he had a nephew.'

'Why'—rather indignantly at this new illustration of the fact of the non-recognition of the porcelain of the earth by the clay vessels that jostle and bump it—'you dined in his company last night!'

'Oh, that odd-looking smug of a chap! And what brings *him* here? Does he want Lesbia,' with a rather grim recurrence to the chronic grievance of his life, 'to tell his hand?'

'You need not be alarmed,' with a slightly offended accent; 'he has no intention of paying you a visit. He merely happened to meet me on my road here, and walked a little way with me.'

'The Hatchesons' nephew! I like his cheek!'

Emma has liked it too, and therefore it is odd that she should feel so strange a sense of ire at the utterance of a sentiment which she shares.

'Shall I find Lesbia at home?' she asks,

controlling the expression of her sentiment so successfully, that Tom, who is always partial to her society, gladly abandons whatever his projects for the afternoon had been to escort her to the house, answering:

'Yes; you know she never goes out on Sunday afternoon.'

'Is she alone?'

'Yes, for a wonder,' with an intonation of thankfulness. 'And it *is* a wonder nowadays. We are by ourselves! McDougall has got the influenza' (Mr. Heathcote's tone seems to imply that the disease has hitherto been too severely judged). 'And as to the dear old gentleman, I think he has been rather more careful since his last Theosophist went off with the spoons!'

'It was never proved against him!' cries Emma indignantly.

'She has the children with her, of course; but you do not mind them.'

'I thought you told me last night that she never had the children with her now! See what loose accusations husbands bring against their wives!'

She speaks rallyingly, but her mind is occupied by quite another subject. She is measuring with her eye the distance between them and the lovely old house of red brick, crossed with dim blue, that faces her at the end of the drive, which, as in the case of so many Tudor and Jacobean houses, leads straight as a die and without any insincere divergences to right or left to the hall-door. She is saying inwardly that, ere that interval is crossed, she must either by direct inquiry or, preferably, by wily insinuation, have extracted from Tom his opinion of the ethical tendency of 'Miching Mallecho.' That he should have been nearly twenty-four hours in the house with that work without having had the curiosity to glance between its pages, seems to her a hypothesis hardly worth entertaining. She begins her approaches with indirect subtlety.

'Did you go to church this morning?'

'*I* did. Lesbia did not. I could not get her off in time.'

'Indeed! I know that she is never quite up with the lark. But' (laughing rather

consciously) 'what made her so unusually late?'

'She sat up most of the night reading, and consequently wild horses would not have got her out of bed this morning, even to sit under the angel Gabriel.'

Here is her opportunity. She must not lose this second one, far inferior as it is to the golden chance she had thrown away in Mr. Hatcheson's wood. What can be easier or more natural then to inquire the nature of studies so absorbing? But before she can frame the inexplicably difficult sentence her opportunity is gone.

'If you could give her a hint that it is not only I who notice how she is letting her constitutional indolence grow upon her,' says Tom, whose mind is evidently running very much more upon his wife's shortcomings than on their cause—'I do not often trust myself to speak to her on the subject, because I always lose my temper, chiefly, I think' (with a smile of vexation, yet candour), 'because she invariably keeps hers. But just a word in season from *you* now——'

Emma shakes her head.

'I might pinch my finger between the tree and the bark; and besides, you know, Tom, that Lesbia was my present to you; I gave her to you—do you recollect how you went down like a ninepin when I first took you up to her at the Queen's Ball?—and I do not like my gifts picked holes in.'

She says it with that light playfulness which can carry a rebuke so much more safely than a heavier vehicle, and, being a worthy fellow enough, he takes it in good part; but by the time her mild reproof is ended they have reached the house, and her second opportunity has gone the way of her first.

The old house extends two arms of cherry-coloured brick to enclose three sides of a square—that mellow cherry tint gained, they say, by burning the bricks with straw. As they stand at the great nailed door, the alternate cherub-heads and squirrels that decorate the spouts look down humorously at them and at the nigh three-hundredth set of loosened leaves, sailing goldenly down

from tree-bough to sward, which their little blackened oak faces have kept watch on.

Tom does not escort his wife's cousin farther than the portal, so that there is no opportunity for her to repair her former dilatoriness in inquiring his opinion of her novel. As she walks up the shallow stairs—delightfully easy of ascent, yet slippery in their dark polish — to the drawing-room, which our ancestors so commonly reckoned among their upstairs rooms, and her nostrils inhale the familiar fragrance of sandal-wood and of generations of pot-pourri and lavender, which haunt these ancient manor-houses, and of which a king's ransom could not buy a whiff through the length and breadth of the monster continent across the Atlantic, it strikes her with a pained surprise that Tom should not have himself introduced the subject, having got so near it as Lesbia's vigil.

She finds Lesbia herself, as she had expected, in the oak drawing-room, with the tall doors and the coved ceiling, at which, through the good-nature of the old lord and

to the exceeding dolour of the other inhabitants, hundreds of trippers' eyes stare every too-frequent Bank Holiday. The oak drawing-room is in its usual Sunday afternoon state of that entire wreckage which always attends the nurses having gone to church and the sceptre having passed into the easy hands of the children's mother. It is no surprise to Miss Jocelyn, since it happens every Sunday, that there is no chair to offer her upon her entrance, as they are all, without exception, on the floor with their legs in the air, and with the intervals between them so entirely strewn with toys and newspapers as to make walking difficult.

On this particular Sunday the forces of Lesbia's own two babies of four and two are greatly strengthened by a strong-lunged little visitor-cousin of six, who has introduced the new and entrancing game of 'Salvation Army,' and is, at the moment of Emma's entrance, raising the echoes by his sale of *War Crys.* Prodigious as the noise is, Lesbia does not seem to hear it; nor is she, as is her wont, joining heart and soul in the

revels. She is, on the contrary, sitting in a corner of one of the deep window-seats, taking no notice whatever of the children, and apparently so buried in a book as to be quite unconscious of their clamour or even of their presence. So deep is her absorption, and so vociferous are the little boy's calls upon the public to buy his *War Crys*, that Emma is able to go quite close up to her hostess before the latter perceives her, so close as to have no difficulty in reading the title of the engrossing work. It is none other than 'Miching Mallecho.'

These are the sort of unconscious unintentional compliments that strew the writer's path with roses. She lays her hand on Mrs. Heathcote's wrist, and the latter gives such a start that 'Miching Mallecho' makes a somersault on to the floor. Emma is too self-conscious to pick it up, but her eye in a second, with a pang of disappointment, has mastered the fact that the book is only vol. i. To have sat up all night and to be only half way through vol. i. Tom must have grossly exaggerated.

'Oh, it is you, is it?' cries Lesbia, with almost a shout of joy; 'you are the one person in the world I most wished to see! If you had not come to me I should have had to go to you! Oh!'—seizing both her cousin's hands, and pressing them with excited violence—'it is—it is—it is——' Apparently her vocabulary contains no epithet potent enough to satisfy her, for she continues stammeringly to seek without finding one.

'And yet'—with that tinge of disappointment patent in her tone—'considering that you have had it for twenty-four hours, you have not got on very far with it; only half way through one volume!'

'Do you suppose that this is the *first* time?' cries Lesbia with a high degree of scorn added to her still prevailing excitement—'why, I sat up last night till I had finished it; you know how late and dark the mornings are now; well, it was quite light before I got into bed, and when I did I could not sleep a wink.'

During the course of this last sentence a

stream of diluted joy has been flowing into Emma's soul. If only Lesbia's opinion were better worth having; but, after all, she may be taken as a fair representative of the average public; and, in some notable instances, the verdict of the average public has proved in the long run a more veracious one than that of the adepts.

'You think it, then, not quite without interest—readable?'

'*Readable?*' repeats Lesbia with an accent of concentrated contempt at the inadequacy of the adjective; 'I think it the—yes, dear old chap, of course I will buy *War Crys*'—this in answer to a noisy appeal from the young vendor of those wares—'how many? Well, I should say two thousand would be a good number; that must be all you have, I should think; is not it? and if you have sold them all, you need not cry them any more, need you?'

But apparently Master Billy has an unusually large supply of the journal in question, for, despite his aunt's immense purchase, he continues to march about the room bellow-

ing his newspaper, and imitated as far as their weaker organs will allow by Miss Biddy and Master John.

The interruption has taken but a minute, yet it seems long to the young author before Lesbia resumes her broken sentence:

'I think it the most delightful book I ever read, and'—with a rapturous chuckle—'*desperately* improper!'

'Oh, do not!' with a cry of pain and a motion of her hand as if to arrest and push back the intended words.

'I do not think I ever read a more risqué story! I mean, of course, in English!'

'Oh-h-h!'

There is such unmistakable distress, and of so acute a kind, in this long drawn-out monosyllable that Lesbia's kind heart prompts her to hurry on:

'I do not mean to say or imply that there is one coarse expression in the whole three volumes, but'—with a tinge of ungovernable surprise—'you must see yourself that some of the situations are uncommonly strong!'

'I *had* to make them so!' still deeply distressed; 'do not you see that it was inevitable, in order to bring out in high relief the motif of the story?—the dreadful hereditary destiny that drove them on—my only fear was that from—from circumstances, I should have been unable to give those scenes any air of reality.'

'I do not think you need have had any alarm on that head,' replied Lesbia, with her giddy laugh, and yet dryly too; 'but what beats me is, where you have got your experience—such very startling experience'—with another surprised chuckle—'from?'

Widely diverse as are the characters of her aunt and cousin, and different as is the tone in which the question is put, it is almost identical with that which Mrs. Chantry had asked her at breakfast; and the coincidence gives her a new stab.

'Do you insist on my being absolutely without imagination?' she asks in intense irritation. 'Must Shakespeare have been in the habit of murdering his wife and Fielding of traducing his cousins because they drew

Othello and Blifil? Have not I read? Have not I thought? Have not I observed?'

'No doubt—no doubt!' replies Lesbia soothingly; 'of course I never suspected you of having been through all your heroine's very remarkable'—a slight return of chuckling—'experiences; in fact, some of the incidents——' She pauses in obvious apprehension that to finish the sentence in the only way compatible with truth will deepen the offence that her criticisms have already given.

Emma has begun to walk up and down the toy-strewn carpet in hot agitation, regardless of the Noah's arks, panniered donkeys, and mechanical mice that she tramples in her crusading course.

'I cannot get anyone to see that there are subjects one *must* face—that are a part of our century, that we can get as little away from as steam or electricity, and that the only right way to take them is to try and throw one's little ray of light—it may very likely be only that of a farthing dip—upon their intricacies.'

'That is like one of the moralizing bits in the book, which I skipped at the first reading to get on with the story; but I am going over them all again carefully now; and, oh'—with a relapse into enthusiasm—'do not imagine that I am finding fault with it for being so—so—impassioned! If I have a love story I own I like it *boiling!* and some of the scenes—the one when he makes his declaration in the Canadian canoe, and they are so nearly upset!—I have read it three times already!'

'It is not one of my own favourites,' replies Emma, frowning slightly; 'it was necessary for the development of the tragedy, but——'

What the qualifying clause is will never now be known, since at this moment the air is rent with a shriek from Miss Biddy, a froward pettish little beauty of four, who, growing tired of the Salvation Army, in which she has never been a whole-hearted soldier, now manifests her ennui by throwing herself back in her chair and giving utterance to a succession of piercing and

perfectly dry screams. When the young sufferer's poignant sorrow has been allayed by the permission to pull out and decapitate as many flowers as she pleases from the vases and jardinières the conversation is resumed.

'Poor things,' says Lesbia, alluding in a tone of profound compassion to the protagonists of 'Miching Mallecho,' 'you have made it quite impossible for one to blame them. How well you have made one feel that sense of irresistible power in the background, pushing them on out of the past; and that if they did go wrong, it was their grandfather's fault, and not their own!'

'Good Heavens!' cries Emma in an inexpressibly shocked tone, and absolutely turning pale at this most unexpected turn given to her teaching; 'how frightfully you have misunderstood me! How could you imagine that I should wish to preach such a vicious doctrine of fatalism? What I tried most earnestly to bring into strong relief—I can't think how you can have missed it—was the absolute need for much greater self-control, loftier principles, and a stricter discipline in

those who are handicapped by an ancestry such as Odo and Elfrida's.'

Her voice sounds so almost piteously earnest, that good-natured Lesbia hastens to pour the balm that comes handiest into the wound she has so unintentionally made.

'I have no doubt that all that was in the stiff bits which I skipped, and I shall find it out when I read them up, which I mean to do as fast as I can; but after all, why should you mind? One does not go to a novel to learn one's moral duties, but to forget one's own tiresome jog-trot existence.'

The tone of the last half-sentence is so unlike Lesbia's usual one of innocent and thorough-paced contentment with her destiny, that Emma's attention, concentrated as it is on her own sorrows, is attracted by it.

'Tiresome jog-trot existence!' repeats she in unfeigned surprise; 'this is quite a new strain! I always think that no one has so much joie de vivre as you.'

'That was before I read "Miching Mallecho,"' replies Lesbia jokingly, and yet with a strain of seriousness too. 'I think

8

that Tom compares very unfavourably with Odo.'

'Has Tom'—tremblingly and losing sight of the unwifeliness of the last remark, in the vista of possible criticism from a more valuable source than Mrs. Heathcote's that it opens—'has Tom, too, read it?'

'Bless your heart, no! his only acquaintance with it was to toss it on the floor, when he found me buried in it. I was reading the canoe scene for the second time just when I ought to have been putting on my bonnet for church.'

'Tossed it on the floor!' repeats Emma, again paling, and feeling as if some degrading physical indignity had been inflicted upon herself.

'He did not know that it was yours, as he had quite forgotten the title, and he picked it up and begged my pardon, but I have not spoken to him since; you know how difficult it is to me to keep up a quarrel with anyone for five minutes; but one does owe something to one's dignity!'

It is with a very very modified sense of

pleasure in the encomiums she has reaped that Emma sets off late in the afternoon on her return home. They are from a source that robs them of nearly all their value, and are not by any means of the kind she has desired to cull. That the lurid splendour of her so innocently intentioned pen in describing amatory scenes has made Lesbia really discontented with her lot, is a hypothesis too absurd, of course, to be entertained for a moment; but she can't help feeling that there is something ill-omened in the fact that the first practical effect of her teaching has been to make a good, if rather foolish, woman neglect all her duties to God and man, and has enabled her for the first time in her married life to sulk with her husband for a whole day.

CHAPTER VI.

'Shall you be at Lady ——'s to-night? I'm told that the Brahmin is to be there, and the new French philosopher.' 'No, it will be pleasanter at Lady ——'s conversazione. The *Cow with two heads* is to be there.'

'WELL, Edgardo, I have done my best for you.'

It is a fortnight later, and rather to the surprise of his uncle, aunt, and cousins, to whom he is not wont to be so prodigal of his society, Edgar Hatcheson has run down to them for another Saturday to Monday. There is a slight indication of a jocosity to whose cause he has no clue in the tone of the foregoing speech.

'I have no doubt of it, but how?'

'Why, by asking those Chantry people to dinner.'

It is perhaps a legitimate protest against the doubtful taste of the last phrase, but it is none the less insincere on the part of Edgar, to draw his brows into a puzzled wrinkle as if he failed to recognise the family alluded to. The manœuvre takes in his relatives, as is shown by one of his cousins deepening the offence against his sense of good-breeding by an explanatory :

'Why, Mrs. Chantry and Emma.'

'*Emma!* Well, you *have* made strides to intimacy within the last fortnight!'

As he speaks he wonders why he does not ask whether the invitation has been accepted.

'They declined,' says the matron, apparently reading his thought ; 'a very flimsy excuse, and a stand-offish note. I held you out as an inducement, too.'

'They showed the wisdom of the serpent,' laughing. 'I cannot understand how anyone out of a strait-waistcoat could ever be induced to dine out in the country.'

'You say "they," mother,' cries one of the daughters, perhaps divining the possible morti-

fication underlying her cousin's mirth; 'but I am sure that Emma was as innocent as the babe unborn of having a hand in it.'

For once the young man forgets to be jarred by the unlicensed familiarity with Miss Jocelyn's Christian name.

'May I ask upon what you build that soothing hypothesis?'

'We called there last week, and Emma began to talk of you almost at once, implying what a privilege it was for us to be related to you. I told her'—laughing—'that that was quite a new view to us.'

'I have always assured you that you did not take me seriously enough, have not I?'

'Yes'—laughing again—'but I never believed you.'

'She asked us,' strikes in another girl, 'whether we were ever able to persuade you to read aloud your essays to us; but I told her I was afraid that we were not very much up in your works, and that we hated being read aloud to.'

'What nice, intelligent girls Miss Jocelyn must have thought you!'

'I do not know about that. She heaved a prodigious sigh, and said how unequally things were divided in this world.'

'And now and then an ample tear trilled down her delicate cheek' (hiding, or seeking to hide, a gratification of whose proportions he is ashamed, in the heart of a quotation).

The same subject has been treated of in a slightly different spirit at Emma's home.

'I have been answering for you,' says Mrs. Chantry, holding out a note to her niece when she enters the room one morning; 'a rash thing to do for anyone; but I trust I am safe in this case;' then she goes on in an amused key, while her niece is reading: 'It is very kind of them to ask us to dine en famille, is not it? By-the-bye, does not she spell famille with one "l"?—and I like the pomp with which she invites us to meet her little young man, as if he were the Queen or Lord Salisbury!'

'You refused, then?'

'Refused!' in a key of high surprise; 'why, of course I did! Is it possible that you wish to dine en famille with the Hatche-

sons? If you have such an abnormal taste you ought to have advice for it!'

'Then I am afraid' (with a pretty, though embarrassed smile, which brings out her dimples) 'that I must; for I should rather have liked it.'

'*Liked* to dine en famille with the Hatchesons?'

'I should not have liked to dine en famille with the Hatchesons, but,' firmly, though with a slight blush, 'I should have liked to meet their nephew again.'

As the audacity of this sentiment keeps her aunt silent, with a silence that is certainly nothing less than assent, she hurries on:

'He may not be much to look at' (her conscience here pricks her slightly, as she is aware of a more lenient judgment passed on this subject in her 'For Intérieur'), 'but as far as intelligence goes—and'—putting an affectionate white hand on Mrs. Chantry's shoulder—'you are the last person who have any right to undervalue that — he is as superior as light to darkness to——'

She breaks off, reining suddenly in her enthusiasm as she sees how very little reflection of its rays lights up the face of her listener. It is illiberal and an anachronism on the part of Mrs. Chantry, but to hear her adopted child entonner this hymn of praise on behalf of a young male Hatcheson gives her almost as great a shock as it would do to see her walking arm in arm with the footman.

'I know you have not read his book,' continues the girl, faltering a little under the feeling of the wall of dumb disapproval against which her eloquence is breaking, 'or I should appeal to you much more confidently. But had not you any conversation with him the other night?'

Mrs. Chantry shakes her handsome head uncharitably.

'I did not. I am afraid I remembered a question put two thousand years ago: "Can any good thing come out of Galilee?"'

'But,' with a nervous laugh, and another caress, 'something supremely good *did* come out of Galilee.'

And then the topic drops, leaving both

combatants occupying exactly the same ground as before the engagement.

Miss Jocelyn had earnestly requested her publishers to send her, immediately on their appearance, any press notices of her book, adjuring them with an almost tearful energy, which must have amused them, not to omit any, however trifling or however unflattering.

For several days after 'Miching Mallecho' has taken its place in Messrs. Brent and Lockwood's advertising column, she watches the post with a feverish eye of expectation, and her literary infant is about a fortnight old when an envelope, full of newspaper cuttings, enclosed 'With Messrs. Brent and Lockwood's compliments,' greets her eager orbs.

None of the notices are, as she at once realizes, very long, nor printed in such type or on such paper as bespeaks a very lofty origin. But she must not look so carpingly into details. Here, at all events, is the first whisper of the great outside world's verdict upon the offspring of her brain; a whisper

which she may—her heart pulses loud and high at the thought—hear swell into an Io Pæan.

She reads the first criticism she happens to take up, and a smile breaks over her pretty, anxious face. It has burst into fuller bloom when she appears in the breakfast-room, carrying, as she feels, the verdict of posterity in her hands.

'I have something to show you,' she says in a voice of trembling exultation, putting one arm round the neck of her already seated aunt, and with the other hand arranging her treasures side by side across her plate and over the tablecloth.

'What are you covering me with scraps of newspaper for?' asks Mrs. Chantry, but with an excitement in her voice also which shows a suspicion of the nature of the objects thrust upon her view. 'Where is my pince-nez? Of course I have lost it!'

'Here it is in the middle of your back. How could it have got there? Oh, do make haste and put it on, and read these; they are reviews of "Miching Mallecho"!'

'All tending to "write me down an ass," I suppose' — in a key of stifled eagerness hardly inferior to the author's own.

'I hope so,' joyfully. 'No, no!' shocked at her own disrespectful aspiration, 'you dear thing, not that; but at least they will show you that it is possible to have a different estimate of it from yours.'

Mrs. Chantry is already, with her recaptured eyeglass, hastily running her keen eye over the first of the score of slips submitted to her notice, and reading it half aloud, half under her breath; but so well known have the dear paragraphs already become to Emma by frequent perusals, that she has no difficulty in following her aunt's murmurs.

'We congratulate the anonymous author of "Miching Mallecho" on having produced a work which must place him high' ('Him indeed!') 'among the ranks of contemporary novelists. By his masterly analysis of character, and his scientific treatment of the philosophy of life, he reminds us at every page of the method and manner of George Eliot.'

Mrs. Chantry lifts her eyebrows.

'*George Eliot!* H'm! Pretty well.'

She turns to another.

'In the novel before us, we find a tale replete with force and passion, and which does not contain a single dull page. For the headlong vigour and uncompromising reality of the love scenes we know no parallel in English fiction, except perhaps in "Wuthering Heights." The author has the courage of his opinions, and points his moral—for under the flowers of his rhetoric there lurks a profound seriousness of moral purpose—with the earnestness of a Loyola or a St. François de Sales.'

'Bless my heart! "Wuthering Heights!" Loyola and St. François de Sales! What a happy family!'

She picks up a third cutting.

'We confess to having been unable to lay down "Miching Mallecho." It is a work perhaps not quite suited virginibus puerisque' (a sort of groan here escapes the author's aunt)—'but to readers of a maturer age we can heartily recommend it. It is written

with a verve and sparkle most refreshing to the mental palate, and yet with an unflinching grappling with the more painful problems of the age, a fearless cauterization of the wounds of poor humanity, which would not have disgraced Honoré de Balzac.'

'Come, you are in good company, and such a nice variety of it, too!' says Mrs. Chantry, in a rallying tone that yet ill disguises the underlying satisfaction; 'but what newspapers are these notices taken from, eh? I see the name is pinned on each slip. *The Pudbury Post*, *The Mudshire Independent*, *The Little Didlington Advertiser*. How very odd! I do not think I ever heard of any of them.'

'They are local papers,' answers Emma hastily, 'and no doubt of no great weight in themselves; but straws show which way the wind blows, and I hope it is fair to infer that they give one an idea of what the tone of the Press is likely to be.'

'I am sure I hope so!' (heartily and yet dubiously, too). 'I never heard such a chorus of praise; and is not there one dis-

sentient voice? Have any of the London papers spoken yet?'

'There is just a mention of it in the ——' naming a well-known daily, and drawing forth with manifest reluctance a slip which she has not yet presented to her aunt's notice.

Mrs. Chantry eagerly reads it out loud.

'To novels of the type of "Miching Mallecho" it is difficult to apply a condemnation less wholesale than that of Dr. Samuel Johnson upon the world-famous leg of mutton—that it was ill-fed, ill-killed, ill-kept, ill-dressed, and ill-carved.'

The reader reddens.

'And they call that criticism!' she cries indignantly. 'Let me revert to *Pudbury* to take the taste out of my mouth.'

'Do not be vexed,' says Emma, deeply touched, and yet half amused, too, at the exchange of rôles between them that these last two speeches evidence—she undertaking the part of comforter to her aunt upon 'Miching Mallecho's' first misadventure. 'The —— is of course a good paper, and it

would have been pleasanter if it had treated me civilly; but it is not one of the opinions that really matter.'

Yet Mrs. Chantry remains unconsoled, and since at luncheon, as ill-luck will have it, slices from a leg of mutton figure upon the menu, she is heard audibly murmuring, 'Ill-fed, ill-kept, ill-dressed,' which draws upon her from the old butler, who always mingles freely in the conversation, the severe aspiration that she may never live to be glad of a worse!

* * * * *

From the time that Emma Jocelyn has been fifteen, it has always been a manner and custom that she should stay with the Heathcotes for the shooting of their park. Before the reign of Lesbia, and when it was always a matter of doubt what strange and incongruous medley of persons, picked up in the green-rooms and book-shops which he has all his life haunted, the old lord might invite to meet, or, rather, to be carefully eluded by, his grandson's sporting friends, Mrs. Chantry had invariably accompanied

her niece, but since the advent of a female head to the establishment, she has gladly drawn back, and Emma now goes alone.

It was on the occasion of one of these shooting parties that Tom Heathcote had departed from that law of good breeding which forbids a man to use the lever of his host-ship to compel the inclination of a guest, and had offered her the reversion of the cherry-coloured, griffin-gated manor house in an expansive moment on the window-seat. She has never mentioned to anyone that hot-red five minutes, when she had made it clear to him that, in her opinion, even the pendant stalactites of the beautiful plaster ceiling in the oak drawing-room, and the three-hundred-year-old scent of pot-pourri on the stairs, may be too dearly bought. But she never looks at the window-seat without recalling it; and she sometimes indulges her fancy in pictures of the various details in which her régime would have differed from Lesbia's.

The children would not have run round and round the breakfast-table, and presented

open red mouths for tit-bits from their parents' plates; the gros-bleu Sèvres dessert-service, with portraits of Louis Quinze and his mistresses on each plate, would not have been taken into every-day use, etc.

It is a year when the leaves hang long on the branches, and the shooting of the park has been deferred in consequence to mid-November. Even then many lingering royalties of crimson and gold enrich the clinging vapours that lightly swathe the hedges and fields as Miss Jocelyn drives along. She has set off with a pleasant feeling of moderate expectation regarding the party which she is to join. The 'guns' are, indeed, a pretty well-fixed and, to her, not very interesting quantity; but as to the other section of the party—the oddities, small stars, and sucking lions, that the old lord still incorrigibly insists on inserting—she is in a state of agreeable ignorance. One of the old lord's freaks is an absolute silence as to any fact—beyond the numbers to be expected—with regard to his friends up to the moment of their arrival.

It is not only vague hopes for the future that are giving a pinky tinge to Emma's thoughts, but some small satisfaction in the past. She has within the last three weeks attained —or she thinks so—to the power of hearing 'Miching Mallecho' discussed without turning a hair, and has thereby reaped a little harvest of favourable, if not very weighty, opinions from the averagely intelligent, if not very critical, dwellers around her. To a fresh crop of admiring county newspapers her publisher has this morning added the small rain on the tender herb of a couple of slight but indulgent notices from two semi-literary London journals, one of which has distinctly recognised the seriousness of her moral purpose. The accompanying note, from the publisher himself, though acknowledging that the novel has hitherto moved with a slow and uncertain step, yet expresses a conviction that it needs only a distinct expression of approval from one or two of the organs, to which the sheeplike race of circulating-library readers look to make up their minds for them, in order to blossom into

a distinct success. Lastly, she has lately surprised her aunt in the act of surreptitiously pasting all the favourable mentions of 'Miching Mallecho' into a book.

'But you ought not to leave out the abusive ones!' Emma says in a delightful flutter of emotion, leaning over her elder's shoulder.

Mrs. Chantry gives a guilty start.

'I am keeping another and larger volume for them,' she says, with a sharp laugh at her detection, 'with my own opinion—give me leave to tell you, my dear, that it is quite unchanged, and that I think Elfrida as great a minx as ever stepped!—as head-piece.'

'Actions speak louder than words!' cries the author, giving her aunt a delighted kiss, and pointing to the brush and paste-bottle.

The glow of pleasure that the incident has caused her lasts throughout her misty drive to Heathcote, and gilds the rust-coloured beech-leaves, that still adhere stoutly to their twigs among the stripped quick-set of the hedges that she passes, with a glory not their

own. It lasts all through Lesbia's lamentations—and they are many and long drawn out—over the difficulties of a hostess to whom every particular as to a section of her expected guests is denied.

'All I know is that there are four of them, because he told the housekeeper to have four rooms got ready, besides those I had ordered. And they cannot be couples, because he expressly said four single rooms.'

'I should not have thought *that* conclusive evidence.'

'It would not be in our walk of life, but——'

'How do you know what walk of life they are in?'

'I know what walk of life they are not in!' (laughing). 'It is the one particular in which all grandpapa's friends agree. Do you remember the man who had not a dress-coat, and the other who arrived with no luggage, and did not even pretend that he had lost it by the way?'

'I thought the man with no luggage interesting,' replies Emma stoutly. 'He had

translated some of that odd Finnish poetry which is so like Ossian.'

'I do not even know whether they are men or women!' continues Lesbia distractedly: 'How am I to know how to send them in to dinner when I do not know whether they are men or women! If there are two of each sort, of course, I should send them in with each other. That would simplify matters. And I am sure no one else would want them.'

'If there is a man among them, I make a bid for him; the chances are that his conversation will amuse me much more than either Sir George Cathcart's or Sir Bertram Halliday's.'

'There again I am at my wits' end!' cries Lesbia. 'I have mislaid the Baronetcy, and I never can remember which is the older creation. If I made a mistake the wives would never forgive me. People are so much more particular about small precedences than big ones.'

'As someone said to me the other day, you can't confer a greater happiness on a

fellow-creature than by addressing the wife of a knighted grocer as "The Lady Snooks." But it seems to me so odd that well-bred people should care.'

'Well, the fact remains that they do, so ring the bell for the Peerage. As to grandpapa's rout of satyrs, of whatever sex they are, they must bundle in all together, for I really can't be bothered with them!'

Mrs. Heathcote, having eased her mind by this charitable provision for her guests' entertainment, goes off smiling to rest in her dressing-room, with the most reprehensible volume of 'Miching Mallecho'—for which her enthusiasm has never wavered—under her arm, and leaving a parting injunction upon her cousin to be dressed early. The latter has every intention of complying, but by one of those annoying minor accidents to which the female toilette is liable—the breaking of a lace or snapping of a whalebone—she is delayed so much that everyone, including the invariably late hostess, is assembled before she joins the party. The 'guns' are there, and the 'guns'' wives, and

the rest of the known elements. But the unknown? She is looking curiously around to discover them when she hears Lesbia's voice half-laughing, and yet annoyed, in her ear.

'Why are you so late? you might have helped me! That wicked old man has played me such a trick; one of his "rout" turns out to be Mr. Blank. I cannot send in a Secretary of State to dinner with the Submerged Tenth. I must take him myself; and, of course, it has upset all my arrangements. The others—oh, the others—are much what I expected. The young woman is a publisher's daughter or niece; and the men—— There, again, that old villain has baffled me, for there are not two of each sex, as there ought to have been. There are three men and only one woman; one of the men is—— Oh, there—dinner announced, and I have settled nothing! You must all go in higgledy-piggledy, like the animals into the ark!'

It is of the less consequence to Miss Jocelyn that her cousin had left her descrip-

tive sentence with regard to the strangers unfinished, since she has found out for herself who one of them at least is.

'I have not been told to take in any lady,' says Edgar Hatcheson, approaching Emma with a sort of joyful diffidence; 'so I fear I am not going to be fortunate enough to have one.'

The drift of the remark is so obvious that Emma breaks into a smile that, though not diffident, is half joyful, too.

'Then will you take me?'

It is possible that, on reflection, the overture she has made may seem to her too pronounced, for as they pass into the dining-room she gently tempers its flatteringness by the remark:

'I was told that we were to go in higgledy-piggledy.'

But this, again, sounds a shade discourteous; and her dissatisfaction with the limitation of language, and its inability to express the nicer shades of emotion, finds expression in:

'Higgledy-piggledy!—what a ridiculous

word it is when one comes to think of it! I wonder what its origin is.'

Perhaps he has perceived her half-intention of toning down the compliment she has paid him, for there is less brightness in his face as he answers, slightly lifting his eyebrows:

'If we begin with etymology at soup-time, where shall we have got to by dessert?'

Emma blushes. It is one of the minor vexations of her life that her excellent complexion has a variation ready for every and no occasion.

'We may have dwindled into frivolity by then,' she says, laughing; 'but'—with a disarming air of candour and good-humour—'I give up higgledy-piggledy! it *was* priggish of me; but do not you think that it is often difficult to *start* a conversation well? When one is once launched, one runs on indiarubber tires; but to set off—— And you must remember that I have not yet quite got over my very pleasant surprise in meeting you to-night! I had not the faintest suspicion that you were to be here.'

'Our hostess naturally did not think it

worth while to communicate that interesting fact.'

'She could not communicate what she herself did not know; she was quite as much in the dark as I.'

'Does Mrs. Heathcote suppose then'—in a voice of extreme discomfiture—'that I am here upon my own invitation?'

'Oh dear no!'—with hasty concern—'I assure you that it is nothing personal to you. She never knows who is coming; it is one of the old lord's ways! He goes out sometimes into the highways and hedges.'

She breaks off precipitately, a look on his face telling her that he has taken as applying to himself the contemptuous phrase which, in her perfect innocence of its having any possible fitness in his case, she has, with less than her usual tact, made use of.

'The highway and hedge in this case,' he answers, in a mortified voice, 'was the Athenæum. I met Lord Heathcote there last week, and he asked me down; but, of course, I ought to have waited to have his invitation endorsed by the lady of the house.'

'I can answer for her that she would have done it most heartily,' cries Emma, putting the more energy into her asseveration, as she feels that no amount of present warmth can quite remove the impression of the two unlucky phrases which she has employed. 'Yours is not a case in point; she knows and admires you' (oh, Emma!); 'but you must confess that it is embarrassing not to have a glimmering as to even your guests' names. Now, that young lady, for instance'—slightly indicating by a faint motion of the head the female stranger who, in an ill-advised gown, but with no apparent consciousness of its being so, is sitting nearly opposite to them—'I feel sure that my cousin would be very much puzzled if she had to address her.'

'She is Miss Grimston.'

The name is that of one of the not innumerous publishing houses which had, with the usual ironical thanks, returned 'Miching Mallecho' upon its parent's hands. It is, therefore, with a very much quickened interest that Emma asks:

'The publisher's daughter?'

'His niece; he has not got a daughter.'

'Has not he?'

'You know, of course, that he is editor of the *Porch* too?' naming that one of the literary journals of whose approbation Emma has been most avid, and which has as yet maintained a strict and tantalizing silence.

'No; I did not! How very interesting!' She makes this last ejaculation in such a heartfelt voice, half under her breath, that he looks at her with surprise.

'Do you pin your faith upon the *Porch* much, then?'

'Oh no!'—afraid of having betrayed herself—'not particularly; at least—yes—I think I should generally send for a book that it recommended, and avoid one that it condemned. And—does Miss Grimston write?'

A look of rather malicious amusement comes into his eyes.

'She once wrote a novel.'

'A successful one?'

'Well, no; it was rather signally the reverse.'

'Poor thing! and she has never tried again?'

'No. Since her disaster, which I believe she took very much to heart, she has confined herself to tomahawking others.'

'Does she—does she' (rather falteringly) —'does she review novels for the *Porch?*'

'Now and then, I think; not as a rule. As a rule, I fancy that her uncle does not think her work quite up to the mark!'

'And when she does review, she *tomahawks!* Oh! how can she? Having known what the suffering is, how can she have the heart to inflict it on others?'

'Slaves always make the worst slave-drivers,' he answers, looking at her with a surprised admiration, and thinking what a divine capacity for pity, even of a kind of pain the least likely to affect herself, the slight tremble in her gentle voice and the half-suffusion of her lovely eyes evidence.

He has troubles of his own just now, and he can't help thinking how very delightful it would be if she would tremble and suffuse over them. She innocently leads the way in

the direction to which his thoughts have travelled. If she has perceived, without offence, the admiration of his eyes, she has also read the surprise in them, and both together hurry her to a new topic.

'I was the more astonished to see you here, as I had an idea that journalists' only possible holiday was Sunday, and that *Sunday Suns* and *Observers*' (with a laugh) 'had not even that. How have you managed to get out of the *Epoch's* clutches in the middle of the week?'

'I am no longer in its clutches at all.'

'You have left it?'

'It has left me!'

'Do you mean to say'—in a voice of horrified incredulity—'that the editor has—it sounds absurd—dismissed you?'

'He has dismissed himself.'

There is a slight pause, she not knowing how to frame her next question delicately enough, he experiencing an unreasonable sense of disappointment in realizing that, sincere and kindly as is her interest in the record of his woes, it is not of that eye-veiling,

voice-shaking quality which she had just now wasted upon the no doubt richly-deserving victims of Miss Grimston's vindictive pen.

'Do you care to tell me about it?' she asks presently, treading cautiously upon his possible susceptibilities, as a cat upon hot bricks, 'or is it a subject upon which you had rather be silent?'

'I care very much to tell you, if you are good enough to care to listen to me; but I do not want to be an "Ancient Mariner," buttonholing you against your will about my albatross. Other people's albatrosses'—with a dry smile—'are apt to be not very amusing birds!'

'I must confess'—smiling, too—'to have been bitterly disappointed when I saw a stuffed albatross at the Natural History Museum!'

'Do you remember De Quincy's disgust when he read aloud the "Ancient Mariner" to Lady Carbery; and she would always talk of him as "the old quiz"?'

'I do not think I ever heard it'—attentive and delighted—'but,' with an immediate

return, even from this choice literary morsel, to the original subject, which shows how unfeigned is her interest in it, 'but we are getting away from your albatross.'

'I wish most sincerely that I could get away from it.'

'You say'—with a shade of wary interrogation in her tone—'that your editor has dismissed himself?'

'The proprietor of the paper sold it over his head to a man of diametrically opposite political views, to which he would have had to make the paper conform. So he has done the only thing he could do, and resigned, and his staff have done the only thing they could do, and followed his example.'

'And you are all thrown upon the world?'

Her eyes are still perfectly unmistful, but such a charming mixture of emotions is battling in her face—half incredulous indignation that yet does not quite comprehend the extent of the misfortune, a delicate fear of expressing the wrong shade of sympathy—that he forgets to envy the slain of Miss Grimston's stiletto.

'No doubt when he gets another editorship (if he does), he will take us on again; but meanwhile——'

'Meanwhile?'

'Meanwhile?—oh, meanwhile'—trying, but with an evident effort, to speak lightly—'there is lamentation in Tregunter Road.'

Emma is distressedly silent. If a friend breaks his leg, you may proclaim your compassion at the Market Cross; but if you wish to console him for a pinched pocket, it must be in a whisper. In her ignorance of the precise size of the catastrophe in this case, and her terror of seeming intrusive, she is at a loss how to frame even that whisper.

And yet seeing, as she now plainly does, the new lines of harass drawn upon his face since their meeting in the wood, she cannot refrain from tendering him her balm.

'I never heard such a piece of political profligacy!' she says indignantly; 'and no doubt it entails a very serious loss upon—upon the others—your late colleagues, I mean; but surely to you—with *your* reputa-

tion—in the position in literature that *you* have made for yourself—it cannot be of much consequence! with *you* it can only be l'embarras de choix! *you* can have only to pick and choose!'

She says it all with that delightful air of utter veracity; that respectful homage which he has ever found so intoxicating in his intercourse with her. Never in his life before has it been his lot to be thrown with a beautiful and high-bred lady, to whom his attitude has to be one of perpetual protest that he really is not so great a man as she takes him to be. To a firm believer it is almost as difficult to prove that you are not a genius as it is to impress the converse upon the unbelieving world. He does not even know whether he is quite sincere in his wish to disabuse her; so exceedingly sweet to him is the reverence in her lifted eyes; ridiculous and fatuous as it is in him to dare to appropriate it.

'I do not know which to wish,' he says in a troubled voice—and with a half laugh—'that you should lend your magnifying

glasses to my publishers, and my public, or take them off yourself! If I were honest, I should wish the latter; but I do not think I am honest!'

'After all, it may be a blessing in disguise,' she goes on, encouraged by seeing the lightening of the cloud in his face, and passing utterly by his effort, which he himself with self-contempt feels to have been an absurdly faint one, to set himself on his true level—'your temporary freedom from the daily bondage of journalism will leave you at liberty for your *real* work—the creative work by which you will live; now, perhaps'—with a radiant smile, as if announcing some evident 'Evangel'—you will give us another volume of "Warp and Woof"!'

'And Miss Grimston shall review it!'

'Does she do nothing but review? Is she wholly and solely destructive?' asks Emma, looking across with a rather repelled curiosity at their vis-à-vis; and reflecting, with a sinking heart, upon what scant mercy her own tender bantling will find if the editor of the *Porch*, in cruel exception to his rule, commits

that pretty innocent's fate to his niece's ruthless hands.

'She lectures.'

'Indeed! upon what?'

He hesitates perceptibly.

'Upon—upon subjects that women had better let alone.'

'I am afraid'—rather protestingly—'that you think most subjects come under that head.'

He does not answer for a moment. His ear is evidently cocked to catch the accents of the lady opposite; and it is with a rather sarcastic smile that he presently says:

'I thought so! she is talking of Malthus! She generally begins a conversation with Malthus! her present neighbour does not seem to care much about it.'

He certainly does not, and as he is the least awake of the two mud students, it is perhaps not very surprising that he is shrinking away with a terrified air from a determined appellation on the part of the lady, which a pause in the general conversa-

tion makes ludicrously audible, as to his views on population.

Miss Jocelyn breaks into a low laugh; which she accompanies with an almost imperceptible shrug, and a slight raising of the nut-brown line of her eyebrows.

'I think upon the whole that we will not allow her to review the second series of "Warp and Woof."'

We! What a bewildering partnership a word of two letters may imply! . . .

'I think my "higgledy piggledy" answered pretty well, eh?' says Lesbia *sotto voce* to Emma as they follow the other ladies up the low, broad stairs; 'you looked very happy with your little scribbler; indeed, to tell the truth, I would have gladly exchanged my Downing Street for your Grub; Mr. Blank is "bête comme il y en a peu;" he has only two subjects, the Burials Bill, and the separation of paupers in the workhouse; but, however'—light-heartedly—'it might have been worse! There might have been more women—more of grandpapa's women, I mean'—laughing. 'The women are far the

CHAPTER VII.

'If we judge according to the sentiments of some critics and some Christians, no author will be saved in this world, and no man in the next.'

'I HAVE just been hearing that you will never be anything but the shoe on the coach-wheel,' says Emma, as she passes Mr. Hatcheson a quarter of an hour later, and breaking into a ripple of laughter as she sees the mystification of his face.

But she does not stop to explain, flitting tantalizingly away. The next time that he sees her she is sitting in a window-seat with her host, the same window-seat on which she had once sat with the same host under much more agitating conditions. It has a curious attraction for him still.

'He has let us down pretty easily this time,' Tom says, alluding to his father, who has just entered the room. The old lord never dines with his company, but strolls in about ten o'clock in a white cotton nightcap, with a coronet-surmounted initial embroidered on the front, and concerning which his one pre-occupation is that it should come exactly in the middle of his forehead. 'He has let us down pretty easily this time; only four; and not one apparently taken quite from the criminal classes! Blank is a bore, of course; but these good ladies'—indicating the matrons whose ice is palpably melting before the fire of the Burials Bill—'enjoy talking to a Cabinet Minister, even if he makes them yawn. You tell me that young Hatcheson is a genius. I do not see much sign of that, but he is a knowledgeable kind of chap when you come to talk to him. I do not much like the lady's looks. Ha! ha! she is tackling the old gentleman about his nightcap.'

'She is much more likely to be tackling him about the Regeneration of Man! Do you know'—speaking with playful mouthing

—'that she is a member of the World's Women's Federation? If you want to be regenerated, now is your time! Mr. Greville'—smiling up with pretty friendliness at a maturely good-looking man, who has paused beside her—'do *you* wish to be regenerated?'

'It depends upon who wishes to regenerate me,' he answers, letting himself down upon the window-seat on her other side. 'I confess that the houri in mustard-colour inspires me with no desire to be born again!'

Emma laughs, and since a moment later she laughs again so heartily at another observation of her new neighbour's as not to hear a remark made to her at the same time by Tom, the latter judiciously, though not altogether willingly, retires.

Mr. Greville is a bachelor, who, although much her senior, has, ever since she was sixteen, been 'given' to Emma by the neighbourhood. They are both quite well aware of the fact, and even enter into the joke to the extent of being much more empressé in their manner to each other when in company than alone. As there is the harmlessness of

long familiarity in the tradition of their being each other's destiny, and as Mr. Greville is supposed, on being taken to task by a friend upon his single state, to have uttered the dictum, that he should be very happy to marry if his wife would consent to live next door, she is perfectly comfortable and at ease in his society.

'Do you think he is pleased with his job lot this time?' asks Miss Jocelyn's companion, glancing with amusement at the old lord, who is moving slowly among his 'protégés,' testing them, and quite ready, as both his observers know, to abandon them to their own devices for the rest of their visit, if he does not find them as amusing as he thinks they ought to be.

'Oh, I am sure that he has no desire to be regenerated,' dryly.

'Is she really going to regenerate man? and is the fellow she is threatening with her fan her specimen proselyte? It is always difficult to pair the old lord's curiosities, but do those two belong to each other?'

'Good Heavens! no.'

'Why "Good Heavens! no"? Why should not they belong to each other? Why are you so vehement? I do not recognize the gentle Emma.'

'I wish that you would not call me the gentle Emma. I resent it as much as Charles Lamb resented being called "the gentle-hearted Charles,"' replies Miss Jocelyn, with an irritated laugh, which owes its birth partly to the monstrosity of the suggested mating; partly to the fact that a glance of acute and almost painful surprise which has just reached her from the other side of the room conveys to her what an erroneous idea the attitude of caressing intimacy assumed as a matter of course by her supposed future may convey to one not a party to the joke. Why does she ever sit on that ill-omened window seat?

'There is one person whose absence I at least do not deplore,' continues Mr. Greville, happily ignorant of the revolt that his chronically affectionate pose has for the first time roused in the white breast beside him, 'and that is McDougall; I never can

understand what that little lady'—looking towards Lesbia—'sees to admire in him!'

'It is not him that she admires!' indignantly; 'in her case it is a sort of reversal of "love me love my dog"; it is "love my crystal ball love me!" She would be just as fond of—of—who shall I say?' hesitating for a comparison.

'Of me?' laughing.

'Well, then, of you, if you had a crystal ball! But she has found another soothsayer who I hope will quite put Mr. McDougall's nose out of joint; she is a professional, a woman who lives in Marylebone Road, and Lesbia is always begging me to go with her to consult her.'

'And you are hard-hearted?'

'No-o! I halt between two opinions. Sometimes I think the whole thing charlatanry; and sometimes I am afraid of embarking on it at all, for fear of becoming quite bigoted about it; as bad, in fact, as Lesbia, who'—dimpling with smiles—'consults her spirits even as to whether she will ever per-

suade you to give her your yellow china cat with green eyes !'

'By-the-bye, I am glad you reminded me. I bought a *Porch* to-day, on my way down from London, and there is such a capital article in it on the "Pest of Palmistry," that I brought it here to-night with me for Mrs. Lesbia's benefit; I thought it might have a salutary effect upon her.'

'A *Porch!*' In a second the magic monosyllable has chased all minor themes of interest from Miss Jocelyn's mind, leaving in marked prominence the one with which the great arbiter of literary destinies is now alone associated in her trembling hopes. 'A *Porch!*' she repeats somewhat falteringly; 'the new *Porch!* It can have come out only to-day.'

'Yes, it was just out.'

'And were there—did you notice any other articles besides the one on palmistry that struck you in it? any political ones, or on general subjects, or—or reviews of new plays, or—or of books?'

'H'm! nothing much! There is a paper

on "Nonconformist Interments," a jovial theme for which I think we must be indebted to Blank,' with a slight glance in the Minister's direction; 'the new play at the Comicality seems to be below contempt, and—yes'—a light of entertainment coming into his eyes—'there is one review that made me laugh—a slasher of an unfortunate novel with a ridiculous name; quite in the old *Monday Reviler* style.'

It argues some want of confidence in her offspring that the above description should strike Emma as having a possible application to it. But it is true that at the two phrases—'unfortunate novel,' 'ridiculous title'—the frightful conviction comes clammily home to her that the object of the critic's lapidation is none other than her own ewe lamb. She can scarcely frame the question:

'By whom is it?'

'It is anonymous.'

She had expected the answer, and yet it drives another nail into her coffin.

'And—and—the name? Do you happen to remember the name?'

'What was it, again?' gathering his brows in an effort of recollection. 'It was a nonsensical name, and seemed to have nothing whatever to say to the story. Now what was it? "Mick"—"Mich"—something.'

It is enough. The blow has fallen. No coincidence can be more unlikely than that two anonymous 'Mich-somethings' should have issued simultaneously from the press.

'It is rather a case of a Krupp gun brought to bear on a flea,' pursues Greville innocently; 'but, by Jove! they did knock it into cocked hats!' (laughing again).

'You say that you brought the *Porch* with you?' in a voice of dreadful calm.

'Yes; I have it in my overcoat pocket in the hall.'

'You will not forget to leave it?'

'No; I certainly will not. I am very anxious for Mrs. Lesbia to read it. I think it may be highly blessed to her.'

'*To Lesbia? Blessed?*' in a stupefied tone, and not realizing for the moment that he is referring not to the murder of her innocent, but to the paper on palmistry.

'Yes; I hope it may cure her of magic and McDougall. All the same, if you end by making up your mind to consult the Witch of Endor, in Marylebone Road, mind that you take me with you.'

'Certainly,' replies she, with a vague look —'certainly—certainly!'

She wonders afterwards for how long she goes on saying, 'Certainly—certainly'—perhaps until the fateful journal is in her hand, and she is dimly conscious that her supposed lover is bidding her good-night, and pressing her to make Lesbia drive her over to see the early Corot that he bought last week at Christie's. She says, 'Certainly—certainly' to that too. In fact, there is no proposition that he could make her to which she would not say 'Certainly—certainly' in order to be rid of him, and at liberty to investigate the extent of her disaster.

Even after he has gone there is a still further delay; a loitering over seltzer-water which seems interminable; a reasonless lingering and chattering over good-nights.

She hears Miss Grimston's incisive answer

to Lesbia's polite hope that she will ask for anything she wants.

'Thank you. Yes; I will order whatever I may require, but I must ask you not to expect me to put in an appearance before luncheon. Have you a telegraph in the house, or a telephone? No? I am sorry for that, as the Home Secretary's action will entail my almost living on the wires to-morrow; and I have besides'—addressing herself to Emma, since the slackness of Mrs. Heathcote's interest in the fortunes of Re-generated Man is betrayed by a poorly strangled yawn—'and, besides, I have a good deal of other work—reviewing work—which I must get through in the course of the forenoon.'

She had been taking Miss Jocelyn's hand in good-night bidding when she began this sentence, and still retains it, as if to ensure her attention. But, indeed, there is not the least fear of her losing that. At the words, 'reviewing work,' the young novelist's mind has run with horrified rapidity through a chain of inferences, of which not one link

seems lacking. Miss Girmston does 're-viewing work,' and, embittered by her own failure, *does* it with a vengeance. She is the niece of the editor of the *Porch*, and though, according to Edgar Hatcheson's testimony, her hand is too 'prentice to be much employed on that important organ, yet no doubt to the eye of an affectionate relative her stiletto may seem quite sharp enough to transpierce such a helpless fledgling as 'Miching Mallecho.'

It is no doubt the hand red with her infant's blood which is so pertinaciously detaining her own. The conviction makes her draw away her delicate fingers with a precipitation which, though it is lost upon the Regenerator of Man, is noted by eyes at once keener, more interested, and less self-conscious.

'Do you hate shaking hands?' asks Edgar.

For answer a daintily gloved narrow hand goes quickly out to him.

'No—yes—no. Why do you ask?'

'I thought'—smiling—'that I noticed a

certain haste to flee away and be at rest, in a recent instance.'

'You must never generalize from single cases,' with a laugh which he, with surprise, perceives to be forced, and of quite a different quality from the easy mirth which had marked her last utterance to him.

'It was she'—with an air of intelligence—'who told you that I should never be anything but the shoe on the coach-wheel?'

'Did she say so? Did anyone say so?' with a vague look of non-recollection.

'Why, you told me so yourself!'

'So I did,' pulling herself together; 'but that seems an immense while ago—a whole long, dull evening has stretched between.'

'Did *you* find it dull?' with a slight emphasis which shows her that he has not been initiated—as how should he?—into the joke upon the neighbourhood.

'Not dull,' she answers, with an unaccountable emphasis and energy; 'a thousand thousand times worse than dull!'

Then she goes, leaving him hopelessly puzzled, and in doubt whether he dare offer

himself a little hesitating congratulation upon her having found the evening worse than dull.

Emma has really escaped at last, and with her destiny in her trembling grasp, has sped up the stairs to her little nooky oaky bedroom, which from long assignment to her has grown to be scarcely less her own than her turret bower at Chantry. In a second she has flooded the room with that electric light which, in the Tudor bedchamber, with its powdering closet and its sliding panel, seems so strange an anomaly; has placed one of the green-shaded reading-lamps close to her elbow, and, sitting down upon the straight-backed Dame Durden chair, which for generations has kept its position beside the hobbed fireplace, she begins desperately to send flying the leaves of the review in the frenzy of her search.

She has just verified the fact that none of the articles contained is headed by the name of her production, when the door opens and Lesbia enters—enters as she habitually does, on the occasion of her cousin's visits, to be

unlaced, and congratulated or condoled with, as the case may be, upon the success or failure of the entertainment.

'A party of this kind brings one's vitality very low,' says Mrs. Heathcote, sitting down upon the hearthrug at the girl's feet. 'Thank Heaven that we are to be rid of that unspeakable Miss Grimston for at least part of to-morrow. When she said that she could not put in an appearance till luncheon, I had all the difficulty in the world in not replying, "Why not make it dinner?" You do not know what a time I have had of it! She would talk to Lady Cathcart and Lady Halliday about the "Purity Society." They did not want to hear anything about it, and I am sure I did not blame them, poor dears! Why do you go on reading? I can't have you read when I want to pour out my woes to you!'

'I *must* read,' in a breathless voice; 'it is the new *Porch.* There is a review of "Miching Mallecho" in it; a very unfavourable one. Mr. Greville told me so.'

'*Un*favourable!' repeats Lesbia, in an

aghast key of the liveliest sympathy. '*What* a blow! But yet'—her sanguine nature getting the upper hand, even under the pressure of this calamity—'but yet it is surely something to be noticed at all by the *Porch*. As a rule, it reviews only novels that have made, or are likely to make, a hit, does not it?'

'That is true,' replies Emma eagerly, a light flashing across her face. 'Thank you for suggesting it. There is that cheering German proverb about its being always the fruit-laden trees at which the boys throw stones; but the odd thing is'—still turning the pages—'that I cannot find it. Could I have misunderstood him? Can it be not "Mich?"—ah no'—in a voice that sinks to match the sinking of her heart—'here it is! "On some Recent Forms of Human Folly." There is no separate review of my story! It is massed with half a dozen others!'

She begins to devour the article, but is at once assailed by an impassioned appeal from Lesbia:

'Read it aloud, aloud! I *must* hear it too!'

'I will when I come to it'—greedily skimming prefatory remarks. 'I have not come to it yet. H'm! h'm! "Subjects that should be treated only by experts!" H'm! h'm! "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!" H'm! h'm! Ah!'—with a species of groan—'here it is!

'"This will never do. The world-famous sentence of Gifford upon 'Endymion' may be applied by us without any fear of its predecessor's signal reversal by after generations to the production before us. Not that after generations are much likely to trouble themselves about 'Miching Mallecho.' Nor should we have noticed this contemptible novel were it not differentiated from the rest of the family of simple trash to which it naturally belongs, by the fact of its anonymous author seeing fit to assume the mantle of a seer; to pose as a teacher of ethics; a solver of those abstruse and entangled problems which are vexing the best minds of our century, and for which she—there cannot be a second's doubt as to the sex of the author of this precious performance"—

(oh!!)—"is about as fitted as would be a street-sweeper to head the mathematical tripos."'

'Do not go on!' says Lesbia, laying one hand on her cousin's knee, and looking up at her from the hearthrug with a face red with sympathetic anger; 'it is too horrible!'

For all answer Emma continues:

'"We do not profess to see further through a stone wall than our neighbours; but we can predicate with complete certainty four things concerning the author of 'Miching Mallecho': that she is young, female, foolish, and innocent of any personal acquaintance with the lofty society to which, with such generosity, she introduces us. But she might have been all four, and remained perfectly unmolested by us. She might have descanted, with that diffuse ease for which her style—unfettered by dull laws of grammar and prosody—is so remarkable, upon the exquisite fit of 'Elfrida's' tailor-gown,. and the fabulous number of 'beasts' (*sic*) brought down by Odo's unerring rifle"——'

'Why does he say (*sic*)?' asks Lesbia

indignantly; 'it only shows his own ignorance!'

'Reviewers always put (*sic*) when they wish to be peculiarly insulting,' replies Emma, in a tone that she in vain tries to steady; and again hurrying on as if borne by a dreadful and irresistible torrent,—"Odo's unerring rifle, without our seeking to hasten by a moment the peaceful extinction to which that splendidly dressed couple are so inevitably hasting; but when we find that this puny scribbler has had the colossal presumption to use the tremendous subject of heredity as a lever by which to move her paltry puppets, we say in the words of Mr. Gifford, 'This will never do!' When we read that in the intenser moments of that coarsely expressed passion, by whose aid the author tries to galvanize her dummies into life, the hero feels himself perfectly justified in paltering with a vulgar temptation by the consciousness that the eyes of a forefather conspicuous for debauchery are glaring at him, hell-illumined (*sic*)"'—('*Sic* again!' from Lesbia—'it makes *me* sick')—'"hell-illumined

from the lurid depths of the past, we reluctantly have to admit that it is high time to interfere. A great authority has told us that the world contains so many billions of inhabitants, chiefly fools; and it is in the apprehension that a score or two of these fools—we have not much fear of the 'Miching Mallecho' public exceeding this number—may take it for an Evangel, that among the milliners and 'prentices who will pasture on this masterpiece, one or two may be found silly enough to take it seriously, we utter our protest against such vicious trash. Let the author of 'Miching Mallecho' by all means—if she must write a novel—let her give us her views of the nobility and gentry, as seen through the 'airy' railings; but let her beware of again putting out her feeble hand to clutch Jove's thunderbolt. Enough, and more than enough, of such a theme. We pass on to the second branch of our subject." '

The reader's voice ceases, but she still keeps the death-dealing sheets before her face. In the first moment of bitter humiliation she cannot bear even Lesbia to see it.

Mrs. Heathcote's own countenance, usually so delicately tinted, is purple with fury; and in another moment she has burst into tears.

'Views of the nobility and gentry, as seen through the "airy" railings!' she repeats, with a hysterical laugh; 'well, he *has* made a bad shot there!'

'Oh, that is not what hurts me!' answers the unhappy author in a hardly recognizable voice, dropping the paper into her lap, and revealing features as absolutely white as her cousin's are acutely red; 'that only shows his own ignorance of our world, which I never doubted; but when he calls it *vicious* trash—when he more than implies that it is the power, not the will, that I lack to corrupt my public—my score of "milliners and 'prentices"!' (with an exceeding bitter accent) 'oh! oh!! oh!!!'

Her head sinks forward on the table upon her outstretched arms, but no tears come to her relief.

Lesbia has picked up the dropped review, and is conning its infamies with a running and weeping commentary.

'"*Coarsely expressed passion!*" Why, I thought that you glided so dexterously over the ticklish passages! "*Paltering with a vulgar temptation!*" I suppose he means the scene in the canoe. I am sure that, as you put it, I wonder how anybody could resist it!'

No one who saw her tearful face could doubt the sincerity of Mrs. Heathcote's consolatory intention; and yet, had she wished to turn the knife in the wound, she could not have hit upon a method more likely to effect that purpose.

Emma writhes; and, without lifting her head, groans:

'Perhaps it *is* vicious trash! Perhaps he is right!'

'You say *he*,' says Lesbia, with an intermission of tears, and in an altered key; 'but how do you know that it is a man? How do you know that it is not a woman? It reads to me much more like the work of a spiteful woman!'

'Do you think so?' asks Emma, raising her head from its abased position on her

arms, and with a ray of revived hope in voice and eye.

During the last quarter of an hour of intense mortification her suspicions as to Miss Grimston being the author of the 'slasher' had gone to sleep; but at Lesbia's suggestion they now revive, coming back to her with healing on their wings.

If it be only in the eyes of the Regenerator of Man that 'Miching Mallecho' cuts so poor a figure, the philippic is robbed of half its sting. But this flash of light lasts for but a flash, and goes out in utter darkness.

Even if the crushing verdict upon her novel be but the outcome of the malice of a woman, born of her own failure in literature, yet none the less will it go to the furthest ends of the earth as that of the higher English criticism.

To her heated fancy it seems as if the untutored savage on his coral reef will shortly be reading aloud to his family that 'Miching Mallecho' is differentiated from the family of simple trash, to which it naturally belongs, only by its superior viciousness; and that its author's

sole view of society is taken—though she had professed that her withers were unwrung by it, the phrase stings horribly—from between the area railings!

'It may be so,' she says, taking the paper out of Lesbia's hand, and wincingly re-reading the most offensive passages; 'but it is impossible to tell! Thanks to our system of anonymous criticism' (with an accent of surpassing bitterness), 'the writer can never know whether it is a male or female viper that spits its venom at him or her from behind a mask!'

'*My* opinion about the book is not in the very least changed by this Billingsgate!' cries Lesbia warm-heartedly, throwing her arms round her cousin. 'I shall always think it one of the most beautiful love-stories I ever read. And as to the scene in the canoe——'

But her enthusiasm is arrested by an anguished moan!

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT indolence for which Tom Heathcote has always reproached his wife, and in his accusations of which she mostly acquiesces with so baffling a suavity, very seldom allows of her appearing at the breakfast-table. How much less likely, then, is it that she should make the exertion after having sat up talking with Emma three-quarters of the night?

Her place is taken by Emma herself, who has slept even less—that place which might have been Emma's own in perpetuity. It is a mark of the low ebb to which her spirits and her estimate of her mission to posterity have fallen, that the gloomy idea crosses her mind that perhaps it would have been a good thing if she had consented to seat herself

there. She would, at least, have been saved from the sunk rock of pen-and-inkage so often the outcome of a plethora of leisure.

Happily for her, there is no great call upon her for conversation during breakfast; the worst strain upon her self-control being rendered needless by the fact that Miss Grimston is as good as her overnight threat, and remains shrouded with cloud and thunderbolt in her own room.

The disposition of most of the ladies to help their husbands to shoot the park, and the final appearance of Lesbia, combine to set Miss Jocelyn free, while the forenoon is still young, to dispose of her morning as she pleases. How she pleases is not for a moment doubtful to her. She retires to the library—a room seldom entered by anyone, occasionally wandered round by the old lord, but never so early in the day—and, sitting down at a writing-table, to give herself countenance as of one writing letters, on the unlikely hypothesis of her being disturbed, she buries her head in her hands, and gives herself over to the full indulgence of her woe.

The consolations which had partially supported her under her aunt's disapproval, the lofty axioms that the path of all pioneers is rugged, and that every original thinker must make his own public, cease to have any propping power. Dreadful misgivings assail her, that she, who had always held herself so proudly pure, no less in thought than in action, before whose chaste displeasure all dubious jests and doubtful stories have died, upon whose prudery her cousin Lesbia has so often rallied her, should have been frankly and grossly coarse both in the choice and the treatment of a scabrous subject—assail and batter her self-respect. Is it really the bare and ugly truth that she who had thought her mission so decided, her motive so high; who had prided herself on the vigour of that imagination which had supplied her lack of experience, should have accomplished nothing but the publication of a vulgarly improper novel; the noxious effect of whose intention is only nullified by the poverty of its execution? Can it be that upon that soul which she has always believed to be the home only

of good and elevated thoughts there should have lain all these years a stain of impurity unsuspected by herself, or by those around her, who have always—or has she fancied that, too?—thought so highly of her? The idea is so acutely bitter in its novelty, that for the time it swamps even curiosity as to the author of the stroke that has laid her and her self-esteem together in the dust, and is accompanied by a long rush of tears. She cries for a good hour off and on—chiefly on—secure in the distance of the luncheon-hour, the safe dispersal of the guests, and her own inaccessible solitude.

It is then with a start of something not less than horror that she hears the unmistakable sound of a door at the end of the long narrow room opening and shutting, and sees a figure—that of Edgar Hatcheson—approaching over the Turkey carpet. He is evidently ignorant of her or any neighbourhood, as with a pile of papers under his arm, and a careworn look on his face, he comes nearer and nearer. She had known from his own testimony that he was not a sportsman, but

she had thought that she had heard him at breakfast express an intention of walking with the shooters. She has just time to swallow the last of the many salt drops that have been supplied to her by her sorrows, and to give a hasty polish to her pretty smeared countenance, before he catches sight of her.

A forlorn hope that the subdued light of the room, charmingly dimmed by Flemish stained glass, ceiling-high oak book-cases, and dark old masters, may disguise the ravages committed by grief in her appearance, goes out the instant that she meets his distressed and embarrassed eyes.

'I beg your pardon,' he says, with evident signs of confusion and pain; 'I was told—Lord Heathcote told me — that I might write here without disturbing anyone.'

This apology—an evident preface to a hasty withdrawal — is so plainly, as she realizes with consternation, a tribute to her be-blubbered face, that she rushes into a precipitate answer, delivered with an unnaturally lively air:

'And so you may! Why should I frighten you away? There is more than one writing-table! Why need we molest each other?'

He hesitates, and then—or so she reads his thought—deciding that a persisted-in flight will make her realize the disastrous character of her appearance, he silently accepts her permission to remain, and sitting down with his back to her at another writing-table, whose comparative nearness she cannot deplore more acutely than he does, arranges his paper and takes up a pen.

She hears it scratching for a few minutes, while a soothing and distracting wonder as to what golden words, what mellow rounded phrases, what biting epigrams that scratching may imply, visits her mind.

The scratching stops. Did she but know it, what checks the flow of the writer's invention is the insistent question addressed to himself, 'What *can* she have to cry about?' and the reflection what a prodigious quantity of shed tears must have gone to the production of such a result.

Having no mirror near her, she is not

fully aware of the extent of her disfigurement, and to her grated feelings, lacerated vanity and sore heart, there is something vaguely comforting in his wordless company, and in the recollection of the ignorant yet keen sympathy in his eyes. How much keener would that sympathy be, did he know the cause of her suffering!

She is assailed, it is true, by no repetition of the temptation that had more than once attacked her under circumstances of much less stress, to confide to him what has become so leaden a secret, feeling, indeed, that she would die with shame in the relation of the hideous accusations brought against, and odious epithets lavished upon her. But she draws a secret consolation from the conviction of the burning fire of indignation she could at any moment light in him against her traducer, were she to make that never-to-be-made confession. She may at least, since his still pausing pen proves him at leisure, address a remark to him to show the recovered equilibrium of her spirits.

'You were quite right in expecting to find

the room empty,' she says, addressing his back, rather tremulously; 'it is surprisingly little sat in!'

He wheels half round, evidently still dubious as to her wish to be faced.

'The goods of the gods are ill divided! Now, if I had such a room!'

'The Heathcotes are at least not as bad as some sporting people whom my aunt and I stayed with last year. They have a historic library, and when I wished to see it, I found that the host had not the least idea where the key was, and when it was at last produced by the housekeeper, she said that it had not been asked for for ten years.'

'And no bears came out of a wood and devoured such barbarians?'

He has turned round completely to face her now, being reassured by the comparative steadiness of her voice.

'Your Scripture history is a little weak,' returns she with an April smile; 'it was not for being illiterate that the children were devoured!'

He leaves his theology undefended, ab-

sorbed again by that inward marvel what so exquisite a pattern of high prosperity can have to cry about.

So urgent is his desire to put that one impossible question, that for the moment it robs him of all other forms of speech. Possibly, without his permission, his eyes put it, for she reddens slightly.

'Have you a nice cheerful study to write in?' she asks. 'I always think that the aspect of a room must have so much to do with the quality of the work done in it.'

'I have none at all.'

'*None at all?*'

'None at all.'

'Good Heavens!' in a heartfelt tone; 'what a contrast!'

The comparison drawn in her own mind is between the conditions indicated and those of luxurious ease under which her own ill-omened work has been produced; but it is impossible that he should guess this.

'A contrast to what?'

But she does not explain.

'Then, if it is not an impertinent question,

since you have no study, where *do* you write?'

'I write in the dining-room.'

'In the dining-room? But are not you exposed to a hundred tiresome interruptions?'

'When the children are at home from school they are in and out a good deal, but one gains the habit of abstraction.'

'The children?'

'Yes; my brothers and sisters. There are five of us. You did not know'—smiling—'that I was a householder on so large a scale?'

'No; and are any of your brothers like you? Do they hold out any promise of——' She pauses, afraid lest, if she word her question in the terms in which it only can be fitly framed in consonance with her own estimate, it may jar him by its apparent flattery.

'Of equalling my stupendous achievement?'—laughing—'well, it is difficult to say. My second brother has a decided turn for natural science. He got that from my father.'

'Indeed.'

'Yes; if he had lived, my father would have made a name in physiology. As it is, perhaps you may have heard of him?' Her regretful face says that she has not, and he goes on: 'But he died of pleurisy in three days, just as he seemed on the eve of an important discovery, and my mother was left with us five on her hands, and next to nothing to keep us on. Of course'—smiling again—'if she had known what potentialities lay hidden among us she would have been glad to have had fifteen such geniuses, but as it was, I am afraid that she must have thought us five too many.'

'And had she no one to—to give her a helping hand?'

'My uncle offered to make her an allowance, but as Mrs. Hatcheson had always looked down upon her, she was determined not to be under an obligation to them.'

'Looked down upon her!'

She repeats the phrase mechanically, while a shocked wonder fills her mind as to what

can be the social status of a lady upon whom the female half of 'those awful Hatchesons' could be in a position to look down from a pinnacle of superiority. It inspires her with a speculation akin to Dr. Johnson's while reading the epitaph upon the woman of whom it was recorded that she was kind to her inferiors.

'To a person with whom the money test is the only one, my mother was eminently despicable. If you ever meet her'—with a lightening eye—'you will be able to judge whether she is likely to inspire contempt on any other count.'

'I wonder if I ever shall have that pleasure,' in an alert and interested voice, which proves a temporary suspension of her own mysterious woe. 'From what you tell me, I am sure that it would be a great pleasure. And even apart from her own merits, there is always something so interesting about the mothers of——'

She pauses.

'Of great men?' supplies he, laughing derisively, and yet with that titillation of

which he is ashamed, without ever being able to suppress it, at her magnificent implications.

'Of people who have produced anything of any sort that has arrested men's attention,' she answers seriously, and with an evident modification of her sentence.

'If I could tell you how my mother pinched and slaved, and what a plucky uphill fight she made of it! What odd out-of-the-way methods of making money she hit upon! Once she mended pens for Government offices, and for six months we waded knee-deep in old goose-quills!'

The playfulness of the last half of his sentence fails to hide the love and pride that so plainly pierces through its insufficient veil, and his hearer looks at him with an added interest.

'Why,' inquires she with a kindling eye, 'do not you write a book with the title "Obscure Heroisms," and dedicate it to her?'

Again he laughs.

'How she would hate it!'

'It is not from her, then, that you inherit your—your bent? Does she herself never write?'

'Never; she does not belong to the species.'

There is such a warmth of repudiation mixed with the still lingering pride in his voice that Emma winces.

'It would at least be a more interesting way of employing a pen than giving it a new nib,' she returns with a laugh that betrays a little warmth too.

'My mother knew, at all events, that she was doing something useful and harmless, and that she was doing it well,' he rejoins, with what seems to his hearer so singular an emphasis that she throws an involuntary glance of terrified inquiry at him; but his face looks perfectly innocent.

The shaft has evidently come from a bow drawn at a venture. In a new fear that he may have detected the momentary consternation in her face, she hastens to change, or rather to vary, the subject.

'And now,' she says, with a charming

smile of real feeling which, in his eyes at all events, more than repairs the temporary blurring of her beauty by her still unexplained tears—'and now the tables are turned, and you—not pinch and starve, I hope—but make a plucky fight—not too uphill—for her!'

'Thank God, yes, I try to!'

'What luck for you!' she says pensively; 'so seldom in life has anyone the chance of paying back what he owes to the right creditor! One pays it to someone else probably to whom one owes nothing; but the right creditor goes for ever unpaid!'

The reflection is a purely general one, with no application whatever to her own case; but her quite alien cause of sorrow sheds such a heart-wrung air over her utterance, that an intense and almost tender curiosity as to what elevated high-pressure cause of distress can have eclipsed the gentle gaiety of the graceful sufferer before him seizes the young man. Whether he would have been able ultimately to refrain from attempting to probe a wound which, though evidently pro-

found, is as evidently no business of his, remains doubtful, for, before the temptation has passed quite beyond his power of control, a diversion is effected by the irruption of the three children—the little boisterous elder cousin being still on a visit—who whirl in, talking all altogether, and by their pulling at Miss Jocelyn's hands, and the eagerness of their looks, obviously require something of her, which the loudness and infant indistinctness of their speech renders quite unintelligible. They are followed by their nurse, explanatory and apologetic.

'I hope you will not mind it, but they *would* come to fetch you themselves. I do not know how they found out you were here; I think they must have seen you through the window from the Dutch garden; and I was afraid if I did not let them have their way that Miss Biddy would begin to cry again.'

'Has she been crying already?' asks Emma, with an odd feeling of sympathy for her chubby fellow-sufferer.

The cause of Miss Biddy's grief when explained consists in the fact that being in the

habit of taking all her wooden animals to bed with her when she retires for her noonday sleep, and having them arranged in an unalterable order on her bed, the white monkey has to-day been unaccountably missing from his place in the procession, and her plaint is therefore at once admitted as valid.

Lest the fountain of her tears should be reopened, her request, when understood, is at once complied with. It is that Emma should visit, without delay, the butler's squirrel, and as, upon discovering that Edgar does not comprehend that he is included in the invitation, the daughter of the house opens her mouth wide for a fresh scream, he hastily joins the cortége.

The squirrel lives in the pantry, as a butler's squirrel should, he having caught it when it was young and rash, as it played in the grass in spring-time. He has a large cage, floored with green sod; and a russet oak bough stuck in a cup, figures to him his forest home.

Out of a wooden box with 'Bob' inscribed upon it, he is drawn from his hay nest.

making little vexed protesting noises, for which his owner apologizes, explaining that he is not quite well, having feasted too freely on the haws that are hanging on a branch across his cage. What a dainty surfeit upon hawthorn berries! He cannot be very ill, as when loosed from his friend's hand he runs, with erected tail, to his store of nuts, and begins to nibble with a little sawing noise. His pigmy collar, like a fairy ring, with a tiny bell fastened to it, hangs on one of the wires of his house. For what improbable promenade in Elfland is that collar provided?

The boys begin to ask an infinity of unexpected questions about squirrels in general, with divergences to stoats and weasels; and Miss Biddy, incommoded by the shortness of her stature, orders Edgar, with all the confidence of her two years of autocracy, to lift her up to a height of greater vantage.

He puts her on his shoulder, where seated she varies the joys of her situation by slapping his face with her fat hands, a game which she accompanies with immoderate

laughter. When at length, in obedience to the nurse's request, though under strong protest from herself, he sets her gently down, it is with a smile that he says to Emma:

'"Time dried the maiden's tears." She has forgotten the white monkey. Such is female fidelity!'

'One does not forget one's white monkeys,' replies she with a subdued air; 'one is only distracted from them for a moment, now and then.'

The remark puzzles him hopelessly.

CHAPTER IX.

'You shall have anyone you please to take you in to dinner to-night,' says Lesbia that afternoon, in the soothing key in which a child is offered a bonbon, as consolation for an extracted tooth.

'Is that a tribute to the majesty of my woe?' asks Emma, laughing in spite of herself.

'Will you have your little scribbler again, or have you had enough of him?'

'I wish'—(in a chafed tone)—'that you would not always call Mr. Hatcheson my little scribbler!'

'Why not?'—(opening large eyes of astonishment)—'he does scribble, doesn't he? he is not very gigantic; and he seems to wish to be annexed.'

'You might as well'—(reddening)—'talk of George Meredith or Robert Louis Stevenson as a "little scribbler."'

'Perhaps I should'—(with levity)—'if I knew them; then'—(with a perfectly unwarranted deduction from Emma's remonstrance)—'I am to understand that you do not rise to the suggestion of *him!* Shall I give you George Greville? the idea is wanting in originality, but at least you will both be pleased.'

'H'm!'—(rather fractiously)—'wherever I go, I am always handed George Greville as inevitably as the potatoes!'

'Of course you are!'—(playfully)—'is not he your "intended," as the maids say?'

Miss Jocelyn makes a discontented movement.

'That is a fine old crusted joke; but it is growing as stale as "the remainder biscuit after a voyage"; however'—(seeing her cousin's surprise at this new revolt against a jest in which she has hitherto acquiesced with calm entertainment)—'however—yes—give me George Greville! I shall not have

to "make strange for him"! I shall tell him that I do not want to talk, and he will leave me in peace!'

There is such a spiritless listlessness in the key in which she makes this disposition for her evening's amusement, that the volume of Lesbia's sympathy at once pours over her in an eager abundance that would not have been inadequate to the death of a husband.

'You poor dear, I am sorry for you! almost as sorry as I was for Elfrida when Odo—oh, you do not mean to say'—(as her cousin puts up an agonized hand to arrest any farther allusion to her novel)—'that that infamous libel has set you against your own beautiful characters! If you take my advice, you will not give it another thought, unless you see your way to some really good revenge upon that abominable woman. Unfortunately she is such an "outsider," that one does not know where to hit her; does not know, I mean, what her weak points are; but I dare say your little scr—I mean young Hatcheson—could help us there; they seem rather "liés;" and we need

not'—(with a delighted smile)—'tell him what is the motive of our kind inquiries——'

'You are quite mistaken in thinking that they are intimate,' interrupts Emma, with a precipitation which she, just too late, feels to be both unnecessary and unjustified by her knowledge of the facts; 'at least'—(with a lame effort to repair her mistake)—'at least, I am sure that she can't be congenial to *him!*'

'Then she has an unrequited passion for him!' cries Lesbia at the top of her high voice, with an enraptured jump to this conclusion;—'and your weapon lies ready to your hand. Whip him off from her at once; the only thing is'—(with a regretful cadence and an appreciative glance at the now dimmed and drooping, yet always incontestable good looks of her cousin)—'that it will be so disgracefully easy!'

'I hope that I should never descend to so degrading a vengeance as *that!*' replies Emma, shocked and scarlet—'and besides'—(seeing that her well-meaning, if injudicious, comforter looks discomfited)—'we are not

by any means sure that it was she! The evidence seems to point that way; but you know how misleading circumstantial evidence often is!'

'I do not see who else it could be!' rejoins Lesbia with assurance, but as Emma knows that Mrs. Heathcote's acquaintance with literary critics is so far from being exhaustive as to be confined to the specimen under discussion, the argument does not seem to her to be conclusive. 'I would make you all draw for each other as "Bubble and Squeak," "Flint and Steel," "Marshall and Snelgrove,"' says Lesbia, reverting to her original dinner difficulty, 'only that husbands and wives are so apt to draw each other; and that Mrs. Hatcheson would never forgive me if she found herself one of the partners in a shop. I have always felt certain that they kept a Dry Goods Store in Brisbane!'

'One has to be quite sure that people have no "parcel-tying" ancestors, as George Eliot calls them, before one makes jokes of that sort with them,' replies Emma; 'and so'—(with an accent, and accompanying

inward feeling of strong distaste)—'and so Mrs. Hatcheson is coming! Why on earth is Mrs. Hatcheson coming?'

'Why do any of the strange animals that you meet here congregate under this roof? Because grandpapa has asked her; he always asks people to meet their own relations, and I try in vain to disabuse him of the idea that they like it. He has asked *our* relative, too, but for that I do not quarrel with him. Aunt Chantry is coming.'

'Aunt Chantry!' repeats Emma, in a tone of dismay, and with an instantaneous reverting to her own source of woe. 'And she does not know, and I shall have to tell her! Oh, *how* upset she will be!'

But this trial at least the author of 'Miching Mallecho' is destined to be spared, a fact revealed to her by her aunt's first hurriedly cautious greeting.

'I have brought you your letters; there is a *Porch* among them—I could not resist opening it—containing a review; but I should advise you not to look at it till the end of the evening, as it might upset you.'

'Oh, then you know!' says Emma, while a long sigh of relief heaves the string of pearls on her white neck. 'I can't say how I have dreaded having to tell you.'

Mrs. Chantry's clear eyes shoot out an arrow of indignant light.

'Did you think I should be shabby enough to cry, "Told you so"?'

'No—oh no! you are much too generous! But I thought that you would be so upset.'

They have both unconsciously used the same word to express their apprehensions about each other, and though for the moment they have no opportunity for further reciprocal condolences, yet throughout dinner they throw occasional glances at one another to see how each is keeping up.

As Emma does so, her heart is furrowed by the hot ploughshare of the memory of that blank volume, in which she had detected her adopted mother pasting the laudatory notices—alas, how few and evil!—of the wretched 'Miching Mallecho'; while Mrs. Chantry, surveying the dimmed air of the good looks of which she is so fondly proud,

reflects in bitterness of spirit that the production of a second novel will bring Emma down to the level of the other girls of the neighbourhood; while a third will render her absolutely plain. Emma's own neighbour, Mr. Greville, expresses his sense of there being something wrong about her by the question:

'Have you got a cold? You speak as if you had a cold.'

'No; I have no cold,' replies she, guiltily conscious of the tear-thickened voice which has occasioned the question.

'And you *look* as if you had a cold!' persists he, little guessing the added distress that his determination that nothing short of a raging catarrh can account for the state of her features occasions her.

'Well, then,' cries she, with a vexed playfulness, 'since you know so much better than I, we will agree that I have a cold, or a tertian ague, or spotted typhus, or whatever you please, only let me enjoy it in peace.'

He looks at her in surprise.

'You are very warlike to-night.' Then,

in a lower key, turning completely towards her with an air of exaggerated devotion: 'Mrs. Cave's eye is upon us. We must look more affectionate; we are not looking nearly affectionate enough.'

'Oh yes we are!' involuntarily drawing away a little, under the consciousness that another pair of eyes less malevolent and keener than Mrs. Cave's have been observing her covertly during the last misleading moments. 'You know we must not overdo it, or we shall overreach ourselves. Mrs. Cave will see through us.'

Again she feels that he is regarding her with a puzzled expression.

'I cannot make you out to-night; there is something wrong about you. If McDougall were here, I should think that you had been looking in his crystal ball, and seeing a Death's-head and Crossbones in it.'

'But Mr. McDougall is not here.'

The rejoinder is, as she feels, the *ne plus ultra* of tameness; but in her hopelessly flattened state she can attempt no better a one.

'À propos, I have not yet had a word with our hostess, so have not had a chance of ask ing how my antidote has worked.'

'Your antidote?' blankly. 'What antidote?'

'Why, the *Porch* I lent her—the article in the *Porch*. You and she—for I believe you are in the same boat—got it' (laughing) 'hot and strong!'

If he had already thought his neighbour's manner unusual, that impression is now greatly strengthened, for at his question she stares at him in white consternation. The philippic against palmistry, which had been the original cause of the loan of the paper, and in the lender's mind the only one, has so entirely escaped her memory that, in her misapprehension, she is within an ace of betraying her secret. It is not a second too soon to avert this catastrophe that he gives a further, and this time unmistakable, elucidation.

'Have you forgotten already?—why, it was only last night, and you seemed interested at the time—the article showing up palmistry in the *Porch* that I told you of?'

She draws a long, deep sigh of relief.

'Of course! How stupid of me! Has Lesbia read it? Yes — no. I do not know.'

Her manner is so odd and vague that he looks at her in undisguised astonishment.

'Emma!' he cries, 'you are unrecognizable! What *has* happened to you? A stranger would have no business, I suppose, to ask you such a question; but surely it is allowable in a very old friend, and one who' (with a brief, snatchy glance at Mrs. Cave and a slight smile) 'is supposed to entertain such intentions towards you!'

She looks at him irresolutely for a moment, and then, thus driven into a corner, answers almost inaudibly:

'Well, then, since you will have it, I have had bad news! No' (seeing him give a concerned start), 'nobody is dead, and I have not lost any money! It is a trouble that you would not in the least enter into; and if you are as kind as I have always found you, you will not attempt to discover what it is!'

'You have not been telling George

Greville?' says Mrs. Chantry in a low tone of quick apprehension to her niece, as soon as the drawing-room reunites them. 'You have not been mad enough for that? Men feel so strongly upon this kind of subject.'

'I told him that I had a great sorrow,' replies Miss Jocelyn, with a kind of melancholy pomp; 'but I begged him not to try to find out what it was.'

'I have been thinking,' continues the elder in a hurried key, which shows that she realizes the difficulty of unfolding her scheme under the present circumstances, and yet cannot bear to delay its suggestion—'I have been thinking whether it would not be possible to withdraw the book from circulation!'

Emma starts, and a miserable wounded 'Oh—h!' escapes under her breath. *To withdraw the book from circulation!* Is this to be the lame and impotent conclusion of her world-mending society-teaching mission?

'I would gladly buy up the whole edition!' (still more hastily, as she sees an interruption imminent). 'Doubtless it is not a very large

one. No! no!' (seeing a spasm of mortification crossing her niece's face); 'I mean no offence! But it is unlikely that any publisher would print a very large issue of a first work by an unknown author. *However* big it is' (with an intense energy of emphasis), 'I would gladly spend my last shilling in——'

She breaks off, for the threatened interruption has arrived in the shape of Lesbia, dying to take part in the conference, but balked by the fact of having Miss Grimston following hard upon her heels.

'I am afraid you must have thought me a fraud for not having given a glimpse of myself all day!' the Regenerator of Man is saying, with that loud confidence which is evidently habitual to her in the interest in her subjects felt by those whom she addresses.

But as she gets nothing from her hostess beyond the thinly-veiled impertinence of an implication that Mrs. Heathcote had not perceived the fact alluded to, she turns, though without any sign of discomfiture at the rebuff, to Emma.

'I *have* had a day of it!' (rubbing her hands). 'But one must make a stand somewhere against the petty tyranny of Red Tape. I think I have arranged the whole thing; the simultaneous appearance in half a dozen influential papers of articles, by writers whom I can depend upon not to be too mealy-mouthed, against the gagging system.'

'And you have had other work, too, haven't you?' asks Miss Jocelyn in a not very steady voice, looking apprehensively over her shoulder to see that no one overhears her. 'I think you told me last night that you had also some reviewing work on hand?'

'Oh, I knocked off two or three rubbishy Tendenz novels! But *that* did not take me long! A word and a blow!' (laughing).

Emma shivers. 'Miching Mallecho' is a *Tendenz* novel, and this is no doubt the way, as a light and airy interlude between more serious labours, that its demolition was effected. But, though she shivers, she must go on digging to the bitter root.

'No doubt' (in a faint key) 'your connection with the editor of the *Porch* puts a great deal of that sort of work into your hands! No doubt' (with a very sickly smile) 'you are responsible for a good many of those sentences of death that we all listen to with such respect!'

'Ah, that is telling! Would not you like to know?' returns Miss Grimston jocosely, and walking off as if to avoid further questioning.

There seems to Emma to be something ferocious and ogreish, as of a habitual reveller in blood and tears, about her mirth! She is standing looking after her with a rather dazed air, when her wits are called suddenly home by finding herself addressed by Mrs. Hatcheson, who, with her nephew-in-law in obviously reluctant tow, is rustling all down the room to single her out for attention and, as it appears, reproach.

'Oh, Miss Jocelyn,' threatening the girl with that fan with which she so often belabours the protesting shoulders of the young Essayist, 'this is a nice state of things! You

can dine *here*, though you will not dine with us!'

'But I am staying here!' replies Emma, drawing herself up with a cold little air at the underbred familiarity of this attack; then, as her heart smites her at the glimpse she catches of the hot humiliation written on Edgar's face, she adds civilly, 'We were unfortunately engaged when you were good enough to ask us, and my aunt seldom makes evening engagements. But for myself' (with a graceful smile) 'I greatly enjoy seeing other people's dinners and their table decorations, and getting new ideas!'

'We will make another try for you—by yourself next time, then!' rejoins Mrs. Hatcheson reassuringly. 'I do not know how it is with you, but there is nothing that *my* young people enjoy so much as a flight without the parent-birds! We will have a try for you next time that this young gentleman' (a playful smite on his coat-sleeve) 'is with us! Not that we can make so sure of him as we used to do, now that he is so high and mighty and so run after!'

She sails away, nodding self-satisfiedly, to impart her scheme to Mrs. Chantry.

'It must be difficult,' says Edgar, whom she has—whether by accident or design—left behind, speaking in a mortified voice, 'to parry gracefully an invitation that wild horses would not induce you to accept.'

'Why are you determined that wild horses would not induce me to accept it?' she asks with distressed evasiveness, repeating his words with Metterlinckian sameness.

But even as she utters the sentence the whimsical regret crosses her mind that one whose genius has enabled him to soar out of sight of his fellows has not been enabled by it to soar out of sight of his aunt! He would be unreasonable to expect from her the announcement of a more positive intimation of accepting a hospitality to which she is aware that her aunt would die sooner than give her consent. And it is impossible, since her regret was uttered only to her own heart, that he can have overheard it. And yet he acts as if he had.

'I suppose I am governed by the law

of probabilities,' he says dryly, and turns away.

She is left standing for a moment alone, vexed in spirit, and reflecting, as her eye travels round the room, upon how disagreeably and uncongenially everyone is paired. George Greville is wasting his labours in his endeavour to set Lesbia against her favourite science; the Under-Secretary is slowly grinding facts about swine fever and the importation of foreign pigs into Miss Grimston's rebellious ear; Mrs. Chantry is rebutting with an iced politeness, which shows her estimate of its presumptuousness, Mrs. Hatcheson's officious design upon Emma herself; and the old lord is triumphantly exhibiting to the shyest of the mud students (who has seen it before, and is too dull to feel upon the subject the outraged amusement of the rest of the neighbourhood) the ingenious margin which he has had painted on to his best Snyders by a travelling artist to make it equal in size to the Hondekocter which hangs opposite it. She herself alone had had the chance of being worthily mated for the

next half hour, and she has thrown it away.

Apparently, however, she is to have the opportunity which we so often lack in life of repairing her error, for the wounded author is seen to be retracing his steps towards her. Precisely at the same moment Mr. Greville, seeing her isolated position, has hastily abandoned his intended proselyte and is also making for her. Both men arrive at the same moment at her side.

'She is incorrigible!' says the elder, addressing his remark exclusively, though not rudely so, to Emma, and speaking with the intimacy authorized by habit and prescriptive right. 'I could not have believed that any idea could be so firmly screwed into that little feather-head! Why are you standing? Come and sit down, and I will tell you about it.'

'You were not persuasive enough. You could not have used the right arguments. Though after all:

'"She that consents against her will
Is of the same opinion still."

Mr. Hatcheson'—addressing herself as pointedly to the young man as the maturer one had done to her in a mistaken idea of a needed reparation, and because she sees indications that he is meaning to retreat—'where does that couplet come from? It is rather like asking who is the author of "To be, or not to be?" but I am ashamed to say that I do not recollect.'

There can be no mistake as to the intention of dismissal towards her superfluous squire contained in this last appeal, and Mr. Greville accepts it with gentlemanlike good-humour. Lesbia, to whom he retreats, receives him with a laugh.

'I watched you! Ha, ha! You did not get much sympathy from her. She is all on my side.'

'I have seldom had a stronger hint to make myself scarce,' replies he, with a philosophic shrug, but in a tone of undisguised surprise. 'What does it mean? I am nonplussed!'

'You must not be hard upon her,' answers Lesbia, exchanging her tone of malicious

triumph for a whining minor key; 'she is not quite herself to-night; she has had a sad, sad blow.'

'Do not tell me what it is,' interrupts he, with honourable haste; 'she asked me not to try to discover it, so do not give me a hint of it.'

'I am not thinking of giving you a hint of it; Emma would kill me if I did. I only wanted to explain to you that she is scarcely accountable for her actions. Oh, it *is* a blow! But I suppose'—in a still more lugubrious key—'that she will get over it in time.'

There are moments when honour is difficult, and to the middle-aged gentleman—who has never hitherto been shut out from any of Emma's sorrows, since that one in very early life when she barked her shins and he applied court-plaister to them — the present seems one of them.

The temptation is so strong, since it is clear that a very slight turn of the screw would extract the desired knowledge from the pretty sieve beside him, that he feels his only safety

lies in a meritorious wrench of the conversation in the direction of Tom and the pheasants. If he seeks, he certainly finds no consciousness of having used him ill, in the cool and absent friendliness of Miss Jocelyn's good-night.

Her thoughts are innocent of his existence —as how should not they be?—while her whole frame is tingling with the smart of her aunt's hurried parting words: 'You will take steps at once, will not you, about the subject I suggested to you—the immediate withdrawal from circulation? No doubt its having been published more than a fortnight ago makes it more difficult; but I suppose the copies can be bought back from the circulating libraries, and few things are impossible when one is willing, as I am, to pay *anything* to achieve them.'

CHAPTER X.

'WELL, I seldom see grandpapa's protégés take leave without a leaping heart,' cries Lesbia next morning, as she, her husband, and her cousin, the other guests being for the moment accidentally dispersed, stand at the latticed and leaded hall-window, watching the departure of Miss Grimston; 'but I never, *never*, NEVER saw anyone's back with such pleasure as yours! No; you need not trouble to kiss your hand, you ugly, wicked monster!' as this graceful sign of valediction is visible from the window of the fly, which is lessening down the die-straight drive.

'The very hand that wrought my ruin,' says Emma pensively. 'No; it is not. It

is the left one. And now,' pursuing with eyes full of wistful pain the fast-disappearing vehicle, 'we shall, I suppose, never know for certain whether it *was* she.'

'I am as sure of it as that I stand here.'

'We have no evidence to go to a jury with, and yet I feel it to be a moral certainty. There was a malignant joy in her whole air when she parried my questions as to her reviewing for the *Porch*. "*Ah, that is telling!*"' slowly repeating the recalled phrases. '"*Would not you like to know?*"'

'What an ill-bred way of answering a civil question put by a perfect stranger! So rude and so facetious!'

'Does Tom know what we are talking about?' asks Miss Jocelyn, addressing the silent husband of her talkative cousin. 'What does Tom think? Has he—has he read the review?'

'Yes; I have read it,' replies Tom.

But he adds nothing to this assent, and a minute afterwards he leaves the room.

'Dear Tom!' sighs the young novelist, looking gratefully after him; 'he cannot trust himself to speak of it.'

His wife utters a doubtful sound.

'H'm! I do not think that it is quite that.'

'He *has* read it, hasn't he? He said so.'

'Yes; he has read it.'

'And he was shocked, outraged by it? He thought it disgracefully unfair?'

'H'm! you know what Tom is; how he always perversely takes the view you least expect him of any fact. If you hold out a stick to him, he always insists upon grasping it by the wrong end.'

'I do not understand. What other end is there that he *could* grasp the stick by?'

Lesbia hesitates.

'I am so afraid that you will be hurt.'

'What does that matter?' bitterly. 'What does one bruise more matter, when one is black and blue from head to heel?'

'Well, then—you cannot be more angry with him than I was—what shocked him far

more than the review was the book itself. You know he had never opened it before, and after I had made him read the *Porch* he took it up and ran his eye over it.'

She pauses.

'Well?'

'He said——'

'Well?'

'He said that he was sure you could not know what some of the things you say really meant.'

The mischief is out now, the club fallen upon the devoted head. There is a dead silence. Emma had thought that no further drop of myrrh and aloes could well distil into her cup from the leaves of 'Miching Mallecho,' but this last squeeze has in it a special and particular bitterness of its own. Tom, upon whose sound, calm sense, upon whose sober sanity of judgment, she has always looked as a rock under which she can ever shelter in case of need; Tom, to whom she has always imaged herself as appearing in the light of the last word of female excellence and refinement, the Alpine rose, inac-

cessible on the summit of the snows! This is Tom's opinion of the consummate fruit of her intellect and heart!

'I wish that you had not made me tell you,' says Lesbia remorsefully. 'I knew that you would be vexed, though I cannot see why you should. What is Tom's opinion on such a subject worth? He scarcely ever opens a book, at least, a novel, and you know how coarse-minded men are. They see double entendres when we have not a suspicion of them. It is my belief that there is *nothing* which you cannot make a double entendre out of, if you put your mind to it. S-h!'

The last cautionary monosyllable is a warning that a person who is not one of the initiated is entering the room. That he has heard it is made clear by his turning on his heel with almost the speed of Tom Heathcote.

'Why are you running away, Mr. Hatcheson?' calls his hostess after him. 'We are not talking secrets; at least, if we are, we ought not to be. A room with four doors

in it does not lend itself to confidences. I am off myself this minute. Nobody believes it, but I really am a very hard-working woman. You had better stay and console Emma; she refuses to be comforted because Miss Grimston is not.'

Lesbia seldom quits a room without a laugh, and she leaves one now jollily rippling into the ears of the two grave young people who remain behind.

'You can share my sorrow,' says Emma, with a serious smile; 'she is a friend of yours.'

'Is she?'

'She told me so! She said, "Edgar Hatcheson is my very good friend!"'

'How kind of her!' scoffingly; yet with a tingling pleasure at the beauty of his own Christian name as pronounced for the first time in his hearing by his companion.

'I gather that you do not return the compliment. I have not yet heard you say, "—— Grimston is my very good friend!" I say —— Grimston, because I do not know what her Christian name is.'

'What should you guess?' he asks triflingly. 'I have heard some people maintain that they can often tell a person's name by looking at him. How would you christen her?'

'H'm!' racking her brains in the effort to summon up all the most unamiable appellations within her reach. 'Anastasia? No?' as he shakes his head. 'Theodosia? No? I give it up.'

'Her name is *Rosalind!*'

'*Rosalind!*' repeats Emma, with a sort of groan. 'I can only say with Celia, "Oh, wonderful! wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful! and yet again wonderful! and after that out of all whooping!" *Rosalind!* What a desecration!'

'Yes,' replies he thoughtfully, and as making the reflection more to himself than to her; 'I suppose it is only once in a man's lifetime that he meets a woman whom he thinks worthy to bear that name!'

There is no hint in his manner of an intended personal application, and yet Miss Jocelyn at once feels that he is thinking of

her. The consciousness brings with it a soothed sense. Here at least is a person whose opinion of her—an opinion incontestably far more valuable and probably much higher than that of any other member of her vicinage—is absolutely intact; one who is ignorant of any of the facts which have lowered her prestige with her own family; and if he did know them, would regard them with a widely different and probably reverently appreciative eye.

This pleasing train of thought makes her throw him, without knowing it, a grateful and, what a more presumptuous man might think, an encouraging look. But she changes the subject.

'I see that you have been visiting the library again,' she says, glancing at a book in his hand, held open by an inserted forefinger, and speaking without confusion, and yet with a slight inward glow at the thought of the light in which she whom Miss Grimston had considered as only fit to corrupt the minds of a handful of milliners and 'prentices, is regarded by this man of genius.

'I brought it to show you,' he answers, producing the volume. 'It is the first edition of Leigh Hunt's "Story of Rimini," and must have belonged to Keats. No, his name is not in it, because the fly-leaf has at some time been torn out, probably for the sake of the autograph; but there are marginal notes, evidently in his handwriting, all through.'

'How interesting! I do not think I quite remember what his handwriting is like,' looking eagerly over the young man's shoulder, but she sees none of the pencilled treasures he alludes to; and he himself utters an exclamation of impatience.

'How stupid of me! I have brought the wrong volume; this is Keats himself; their binding is rather alike. I must apologize, and I will go back to the library and fetch the right one.'

'Why should you have that trouble? I will come, too. I dare say,' with a delighted smile of anticipation, 'that you will be able to dig out many other treasures for me. You will be eyes to the blind! Why could not I

have discovered that autograph in all these years for myself? Oh,' with an accent of envious reverence, 'what a thing life must be to one who is born with seeing eyes!'

In this agreeable spirit of mutual admiration they adjourn to the library, and though it is not more than eleven by the old French timepiece when they enter that room—but, then, clocks that date from the Grand Monarque often tell lies—the luncheon-gong at two takes them by surprise.

The expression of astonishment with which both enter the dining-room irritates the nerves of one or two of the balked sportsmen, whom—having been compelled by a relentless soak to abandon their shoot, and having come in an hour ago drenched and cross—they find there.

'*What* a wet day!' says Miss Jocelyn, taking a vacant chair by her host, and speaking in an alerter voice than she has been able to employ since the incidence of her calamity. 'I think there can be no doubt that *this* time we stay-at-homes have had the best of it.'

'Emma has recovered her spirits,' says Mr. Greville to Mrs. Heathcote, by whom he is sitting.

'Yes, poor thing! I am so glad! *How* she cried!'

Mr. Greville's conscience asks him whether the receiving of even this amount of confidence is not a contravention of Emma's request to him, but before he can decide so nice a point, Lesbia goes on.

'She looks fifty per cent. better. I wonder what the little writing man can have been saying to cheer her! He certainly took long enough about it! They have been closeted together in the library ever since breakfast.'

'Has she confided her woes to *him*?'

'No, oh dear no; unless she has done so during this last long séance; but I hope that that is not at all likely.'

'You *hope* so?'

'Oh, yes! I do not want her to tell anyone, and Tom would, I am sure, be frantic if she did.'

'Tom knows, then?'

'Yes, Tom knows. He says——'

'Do not tell me what he says!' cries the other, arresting with magnanimous haste the stream of garrulity which in two minutes more will lay Emma's secret—as to which he owns himself acutely inquisitive—at his feet.

'Emma!' pipes a small voice from a high chair, on which the only representative of the nursery—the little cousin on a visit—is perched.

The lady addressed is speaking to her neighbour, and does not hear the small appeal, which is at once and more urgently repeated.

'Emma!'

'What do you want with Emma, sir? Go on with your dinner!' says Lesbia, in that voice of spurious ferocity which all the children know may be safely and invariably disregarded, and which in the present case meets with its wonted fate.

'*Emma!*' with shrill insistence.

She hears at last from her distant end of the table.

'Well, Billy?'

There is a pause in the general conversation, everyone listening to hear what the little eager treble has to communicate.

'*I saw you!*' says the child, with a world of mischief in his tone, and delighted at the universal attention he is exciting; 'you did not know that I was looking at you! *He* didn't, neither,' indicating Edgar by a nod of his curly head.

There is certainly no consciousness of anything flagitious about her morning's actions in Emma's mind, and it is therefore the more pity that a misleading rose of Lancaster should tinge her face.

'I was in the Dutch garden,' cries Master Billy loudly, 'and I looked through the window and I saw you, and then I made a noise like a pig, and——'

'Go on with your dinner, sir!' says the host in ruthless interruption of this spirited narrative; and though the words are precisely the same as those so futilely used by Lesbia, yet, experience having taught how widely different is the result of disobedience to commands issuing from one source to those pro-

ceeding from the other, the little boy, suddenly silenced, at once buries his button nose in his semolina pudding.

But had he again frequented the Dutch garden on the succeeding morning, he might have a second time seen that sight, his triumphant narrative of which had been so mercilessly nipped, viz., Edgar Hatcheson standing on the library ladder, and sending down snatches of verse culled out of one volume after another to Emma Jocelyn, sitting with lightly joined finger-tips and lifted Guido-eyes in reverent receptivity at his feet.

Once again the luncheon-gong storms into disbelieving ears, but on this occasion, since the sky has cleared up to a low-toned pitch of November fairness, there are no ruffled 'guns' to be chafed by the spectacle of their good-humour. It is no part of Lesbia's easy philosophy to find fault with the action of any of her surroundings. 'Please yourselves and you will please me,' is her slack and genial motto. As to the particular method of pleasing chosen, that is not her affair, so that they all enjoy their luncheon very much;

Master Billy not least, who tells anecdotes with perhaps more noise than point about himself, and draws the reluctant footmen into the conversation to his heart's content.

* * * * *

The day has come for Emma's return home, and she is standing sad and furry in the hall, bidding good-bye to a guest whose departure is so identical in time with her own that his dog-cart immediately succeeds her smart brougham drawn up at the door.

'It has been a great privilege for me,' she says, in a moment of accidental aloneness, looking at him with large regretful eyes of gratitude and appreciation; 'how much you have taught me!'

'Have I?'

'What new avenues of thought you have opened to me! What doors you have set wide!'

'Have I?'

Nothing can seem more fatuous than the apparent acceptance of such homage in those two 'Have I's?' Nothing can have less of coxcombical acquiescence than their tone.

'I am more indebted to you than you can

know,' she says, lowering her voice, while an added shade of pensiveness steals over her face: 'our talks and readings have conjured away very painful thoughts.'

It is the first allusion that she has made for three days to her occult tribulation. Why does she cruelly do it now, when she is obviously going to leave him quite in the dark as to its nature? Perhaps the wistfulness of this wonder is inscribed on his face, for her next remark treads rather hastily on its predecessor's heels.

'There are no friendships so sure as those that are built on books, that is a foundation that can never fail one; so I hope'—giving him her hand, and with a very sweet look—'that ours is likely to be stable.'

'Unless it dies of inanition,' he answers gloomily.

'But it shall not die of inanition! We shall be in London after Christmas, and you know that if she will allow me I am then to make Mrs. William Hatcheson's—your mother's—acquaintance. With my goodwill' —a look which seems to the young man to

be one of heavenly reassurance accompanies this phrase—'with my goodwill it shall not die of inanition!'

* * * * *

'Well, I dare say you are nearly as glad to get home as I am to have you!' says Mrs. Chantry, with a cordial kiss — she is not generally expansive. 'I know how bored you always are with those tiresome pheasant-icides; and as to the old gentleman's contingent, he seemed, as far as I could judge, to have drawn the slums even more blank than usual.'

If Emma winces, it is probable that in the light of the pink lamplit boudoir it escapes notice.

'At least'—laughing embarrassedly—'on this occasion they had dress-clothes.'

'H'm!—in the case of some of them—that mustard-coloured female monster for instance—how far better to have had no clothes at all!'

Here at all events Emma can cordially agree, and in imparting to her aunt her suspicions as to the rôle Miss Grimston had

played in her catastrophe, and gratefully reaping the warm expressions of that lady's ire, it is perhaps not surprising that her mention of the other visitors can be but cursory, and that in answer to a question from Mrs. Chantry as to one of them, she makes only the perfectly true, yet slightly misleading reply:

'No, he does not shoot; he stayed at home. What a nuisance for the ladies? Oh, I do not think so; he did not trouble them; he spent most of his time in the library.'

But though she does not think it necessary to proclaim it, the consciousness of her new and ennobling acquisition, that of a friendship with *such* a mind, warms and soothes her lacerated heart, still bleeding freely from Miss Grimston's stripes. It is giving a light quickness to the step with which she is flying round the shrubbery walks for necessary air and exercise a couple of days later, after a delightful long morning of looking up, reverently re-reading, and marking for subsequent committal to memory all the passages consecrated by having been

either sonorously declaimed or heart-stirringly read from the top rung of the Heathcotes' library ladder.

The day — latening towards evening—is still and fair; and above the banded closeness of the shrubbery evergreens, the hardwood trees, stripped by the late heavy rains, stand out lovely in their nakedness.

She stops for a moment to look up at them, and to think that it seems a sin that unnecessary and superfluous leaves should ever hide the exquisite intricacy of their twigs, patterned out against the green and copper of the winter sunset. Her eye drops from them to a redbreast standing confidently —the dog among birds, as he is in his relations to man—in the middle of the walk, cocking his pretty jocund eye at her.

She has made no movement that could scare him, and yet he flies away. A step behind her explains his action. She turns to see whose, and is aware of the old butler wheezing in pursuit of her, obviously as much under protest as Juliet's nurse on her love errand.

'There's a gentleman come to call on you,' he says, in his usual tone of condescending familiarity; 'if I'd known what a plaguy long way off you'd been, I'd have let him come after you himself!'

Emma gives a slight start. The phrase seems to imply that the visitor is an unusual one. If so, can it be that——

'You need not 'urry,' continues the old servant witheringly, as if reading her thoughts; 'it is not a young one—it's only Mr. Greville!'

'He would not thank you for calling him *only* Mr. Greville,' replies she, laughing, yet vaguely disappointed, and so makes her way back to the house.

She complies with the old butler's advice not to hurry, since George Greville, though always a tolerably welcome, cannot be said to be an uncommon sight; and he is no doubt being entertained in her absence—entertained in the double sense of hospitality and amusement by her aunt. But in this she is mistaken, for Mrs. Chantry is out.

'All alone?' cries she, finding him stand-

ing solitary at the morning-room window, while her conscience pricks her at the memory of three stoppages on her way up; one to cajole the robin, and two more to wonder at the stilly trees; 'poor Mr. Greville!'

But though her tone is one of affectionate apology, there is not much real remorse in her heart. It is only George Greville. As he does not at once respond, she goes on, with the easy playfulness that their old acquaintanceship renders natural:

'I am afraid I am in disgrace; you are pulling such a long face!'

He has his back to the weakening daylight, so that the latter phrase is rather a flight of imagination; but she is conscious of something not quite usual in his whole air.

'Am I? well, yes' (but not in the tone of answering lightness she had expected); 'yes, perhaps you are a little in disgrace, though not for keeping me waiting.'

'I am, at all events, guiltless in intention,' wonderingly, yet still playfully.

He takes a turn about the room, and comes back to her.

'Emma, I am a great deal older than you!'

'What does this mean? When a person announces that he is older than you, it is generally the preface to some disagreeable home-truth, though I never can see how it justifies it; but'—with a smile of confident friendliness—'that is not very likely to be the explanation in your case.'

'But it *is* my case! I am going to say something very disagreeable to you!'

'It will at least have the charm of novelty!' —(with pretty disbelief)—'tell me something more probable!'

It is baffling, when you arrive braced to quarrel with a person, to have your preliminary remarks received in this spirit; and so he feels, but he perseveres.

'The least probable events are generally the ones that come to pass. I have ridden over on purpose to say something unpleasant to you.'

'Then ride back without having said it!' cries she in sudden alarm; 'say something pleasant instead! It will come much easier

to you! Tell me that you liked my gowns at Heathcote, or that you think my manners more agreeable than Miss Grimston's; or some moderate-sized compliment of that sort, which will not strain your conscience too much, but do not——'

'It is precisely about Heathcote that I have come to speak to you.'

'About Heathcote?'

He is aware of a sudden stiffening in her face and voice.

'Yes, about Heathcote.'

She will not help him by asking, 'What about Heathcote?' so he has to go on unaided.

'I may safely assert that saying what I am going to say annoys me quite as much as it can you.'

'That is the consolation which the schoolmaster offers to the little boy when he is going to flog him,' rejoins she, still trying to keep the conversation on the plane of playfulness, yet obviously uneasy.

'I am afraid that you are in all innocence laying up a good deal of annoyance for yourself.'

'It is the last thing that I have any desire to hoard.'

(Does she suspect what subject is being approached? There is a note of alarm like a blackbird's, that sees a cat nearing its nested brood, in her voice.)

'You do not ask me what the subject I am alluding to is?'

'I am not at all sure that I wish to know! Shall we'—(with a last effort to avert the vaguely dread stroke)—'shall we pass to the Order of the Day?'

'It is about young Hatcheson.'

While he speaks to her she is in the act of unfastening a sable tippet. The last word of his sentence arrests her in mid-act. Her long white hands pause, lifted and motionless; but no one can accuse her face of sharing their lily-hood. Since once again she makes no smallest sign of helping him, he toils discomfortably on.

'I should not have thought of troubling you with so disagreeable a topic, if the circumstances had not been likely to repeat themselves; if you had not been likely to

meet again; but since his relations live in the neighbourhood——'

She interrupts him.

'I have every hope of meeting Mr. Hatcheson often again.'

Her tone is so resolved, though a fire, of which Vesuvius need not have been ashamed, lights her cheeks, that her visitor's spirit is traversed by the quick and strangely disagreeable thought that he may be shutting the stable door after the steed is stolen.

'You have always held yourself so aloof and aloft hitherto——'

'*Hitherto!*' (with a new rush of scarlet). 'Do you mean to imply——'

She stops. Her deep confusion, while heightening his apprehensions, renews his courage.

'I imply nothing. I *say* that at Heathcote you—quite innocently as I thoroughly believe, or I should not be now offering you this warning—gave yourself as food to the petty gossip of a hungry little country neighbourhood by your flagrant encouragement of a man quite out of your own sphere!'

There is a dreadful silence; then 'Out of my own sphere!' repeats Emma in a low and blighting voice, made unsteady by three sets of pungent emotions, viz., stupefaction at George Greville's new departure, wounded pride for herself, and burning indignation for her gifted friend—'yes, no doubt Shakespeare was not in the best society at Stratford, nor Keats at Hampstead!'

Mr. Greville breaks into a laugh, which has none of the easy débonnaire quality of his usual mirth.

'Am I to infer that you make Mr. Hatcheson a third in that trio?'

It is very seldom during her twenty-three years of life that her old friend has seen Emma Jocelyn really angry; but he is aware that the characteristic of her worst ire is a marked accession to the soft lowness of her always soft voice; and it is therefore with a quailing spirit that he now hears her reply to his last speech in a key like the whisper of an infant zephyr.

'I do not think you quite understand. Perhaps it is not in the nature of things that

you should comprehend the kind of relation that exists between me and Mr. Hatcheson; a relation between two minds (of very, *very* different calibre, alas!), but in which the one is willing to teach, and the other—oh, how glad!—to learn!'

'You think I am incapable of soaring to such an altitude. And yet'—this is weak of him—'who knows but that if I were put to it, I, too, might not reel off a yard or two of poetry as glibly as I heard him doing to you?'

'And could you have also written "Warp and Woof"?' asks she in a dulcet murmur.

He loses his temper.

'Emma, you are besotted! You talk of a little trumpery volume of republished newspaper articles as if it were the "Divine Comedy" and the "Novum Organum" rolled into one. They are clever, I own; though there is more promise than performance in them. Yes, you may look as contemptuous as you like, my dear child, but though I may not be much of a judge of books, I am quite capable of appraising at their right value

smart ephemeral little papers such as the Universities and the Law Courts turn out every year by the bushel!'

He has burnt his ships with a vengeance, and he now sees that he is about to be left desolate on the strand, for she moves to the door.

'Emma!' he cries, dismayed at the effect of his rhetoric, for he has caught a glimpse of her face. 'Emma, am I dismissed?'

She would give worlds not to answer him at all, but the traditions of her upbringing and her own native politeness forbid it.

'I am going to look for my aunt,' she replies in a muffled voice, full of tears and trembling.

'I do not want your aunt.'

But as he somewhat loudly makes this courteous declaration, so much in contradiction with his usual high-breeding, the door opens to admit two lamp-bearing footmen, and his prey slips past them and escapes him.

CHAPTER XI.

WARM as is Emma's admiration for the unclad beauty of the oaks and elms of her country home, it is not potent enough to hinder her from exchanging them for the smuttiness of the London planes early in January.

Immediately after Christmas, as is her invariable habit, Mrs. Chantry moves to London. Having a comfortable house of her own, she has not to endure the yearly trial of toiling through house-agents' lists, and making searching inquisitions into water supplies and kitchen ranges. The migration is accomplished as easily as that of the Vicar of Wakefield and Mrs. Primrose from the blue bedroom to the brown.

Emma is glad to reach South Audley Street

on several accounts. To most people, indeed, the leisurely and rational sociability of the pre-Easter period is infinitely preferable to the unfeeling scramble of June and July. But Emma has more private and special causes for satisfaction than this. She is longing to visit her publishers, to see whether in a personal interview she can extract more reassurance, or at all events more information, out of them, than she has been able to do from their scant and discouraging letters, which, beyond enclosing several more reviews, all uniformly disparaging, though none with quite the venom of the *Porch* — have contained little save perfunctory regrets at the miscarriage of "Miching Mallecho." Nor has she from private sources derived any light upon the authorship of the fatal article.

Another reason for her gladness at being in London lies in the fact that that capital contains, among its other perhaps better-known thoroughfares, Tregunter Road, the home of the object of that new and exalted amity which, despite the gross misinterpretation which has been put upon it by one

who ought to have known her better, she is quite as much resolved as ever to pursue.

The person so wanting in nicety of comprehension has not repeated his offence, which is all right, nor his visit, which is not quite so right, for though she has never been at all consciously thankful for him, any more than for the fire in her turret room, or the muffins at tea, she finds that she misses him, if not quite as much as she would the first, undoubtedly more than the second. She has dreaded her aunt's astonished comments upon his unexampled absence, but to her relieved surprise Mrs. Chantry makes none.

Not four-and-twenty hours have elapsed since Miss Jocelyn's arrival in London before she finds herself seated in the private room behind the office of Messrs. Brent and Lockwood, and receiving, with that mournful dignity which draws its toga across the gash of its death-wound, the polite but unmistakable statements of the younger of the two partners as to the absolute stagnation of the market for her production.

'There is no hope of its reaching a second

edition, then?' she asks, trying to speak as if the number of copies of 'Miching Mallecho' in Mr. Mudie's hand were a matter of superb indifference to her.

Mr. Lockwood shakes his head.

'I will inquire into the state of the sale. When I did so a week ago, there were still nearly 100 copies on hand of the original issue of 250.'

He says it with an air of respectful regret, but she somehow feels that the respect is wholly for herself and her sables, and not in any degree for the work whose early extinction he narrates.

'And you attribute the cessation of the sale entirely to the article in the *Porch?*'

'Up to that date there were indications that it might be popular with a certain section of the public.'

The publisher is a young man, and not a particularly refined one; but he has no intention of being impertinent. Yet Emma has a dreadful feeling that it is not that portion of the reading world best worth pleasing to which he is alluding.

'But since the *Porch*'? (her voice gives evidence of a rent in the Stoic toga).

'Since the appearance of the *Porch*—the subsequent reviewers having taken the same tone—the book has practically ceased to move.'

For a few moments after the delivery of this fiat, Miss Jocelyn sits in desolated silence, vacantly eyeing the brand-new books, which in red, blue, and green, in threes, in twos, in ones, stand on the publisher's table at her elbow. The woe written on her extremely pretty face, heightened by contrast with the perfect prosperity which every detail of her appearance—even to the admirable glove on the hand which supports her wilted head—evidences, moves her executioner to pity, for he makes an attempt at consolation.

'It is always difficult to foretell what the public will like. The only perfectly safe line is the domestic. Now, there is a slight work which we have just brought out (if you will allow me, I shall be pleased to send you a copy)'—glancing over the novels on the table—'"Hame! Hame! Hame!" As you

may see by the title, it is on purely domestic lines, the reviewers have been almost unanimous in its praise, and we can't print it fast enough.'

'Indeed!' replies Emma, if possible more cast down than before by this speech. 'I think you told me in your last letter that you did not know who the writer of the article in the *Porch* was. Have you been able to discover it since?'

Mr. Lockwood slightly shrugs his shoulders.

'As a rule, Blank and Dash' (naming two rising young literary barristers) 'do the novels; it is very probably one of them, but it is impossible to say for certain. Grimston has several occasional contributors to whom he now and then sends a book.'

'Grimston!' repeats Emma meditatively; 'he is the editor, is not he?' after a moment's pause. 'Did it strike you when you read the article that it might be by a *woman?*'

The idea had not specially occurred to the publisher; but now that it is suggested to him, he thinks it quite likely, more especially

as he is aware of the possession by the Jupiter of the *Porch* of a niece, in whose way he is credited with a desire to throw journalistic and critical work.

Emma rises, but she still hesitates, the tips of her long Suède-clad fingers lightly resting on the table, and her eyes inattentively reading the title of her successful rival — the triumphant 'Hame! Hame! Hame!' Is it possible that she must leave the office, which she had entered with such a reserve fund of vague hopes, unwarmed by one ray of encouragement, unenriched by one crumb of knowledge?

'I must, then, resign myself to remaining for ever in ignorance of who has struck the blow? I should think' (with a pink ripple of indignation, which her hearer admires a good deal more than he has ever done 'Miching Mallecho') 'that no one would be anxious to proclaim such an achievement!'

Mr. Lockwood cannot forbear a smile.

'I am sorry that you take it so much to heart. After a second or third venture you will grow more case-hardened!'

At his words a beam of pale hope steals across her soul.

'You do not discourage me from making a second attempt! You would——'

'I am afraid we could not see our way to producing a second novel on quite the same terms,' he replies rather precipitately. 'I am afraid——'

But she does not let him finish his sentence.

'I have no wish that you should be out of pocket by me!' she interrupts in a low voice, but with a scarlet face. 'If you have been, or are likely to be, losers by—by "Miching Mallecho," pray let me know at once!'

So saying, she picks up her dropped muff, and, with a bow and a gait which, unlike her literary offspring, are beyond criticism, walks out of the room! Nor does one of the clerks, whom she passes in the outer office, suspect, seeing how high she carries her well-dressed head, that her heart is in her expensive boots!

The immediate outcome of her visit is a succumbing to the temptation, which Lesbia

spired! Mr. McDougall—and you know how good he is—says that he quite sits at her feet! One really does carry one's life in one's hand when one gets into a hansom nowadays! She tells your fortune by cards, by the divining-rod, and by the crystal ball. I like the crystal ball best myself! The streets are like glass this morning! Have you got your feet stretched out well before you? I hope she will be able to give us an early day; but there really is such a run upon her! How I wish the 'buses would strike again! What a paradise the town was during the two or three days when there were nothing but a few pirates!'

With this mixed strain of jubilation over what Emma uncomfortably feels to be Mrs. Heathcote's victory over her own common-sense, and of apprehension for the safety of her limbs, Lesbia beguiles the way, till the cab draws up at a mean little house—upon whose door is inscribed the name of 'Jessica Villa'—in the Marylebone Road. They are admitted by a parlourmaid into a small and commonplace room, where they are presently

joined by a fat, elderly woman of the boarding-house-keeper type. At the sight of her vulgar face and the sound of her uneducated voice, the sense of repentant shame at her own action, which has been growing upon Emma ever since she had first yielded to Lesbia's importunities, deepens into an eager desire for the possibility of retreat; but it is now too late for that.

'This lady has heard so much of you,' begins Lesbia, bowing, and in what her cousin feels to be an unnecessarily respectful voice, 'that she wishes you to tell her fortune in all three ways. We have come to make an appointment. Of course, I know how deeply engaged you always are; but if you *could* give us an early day?'

She makes the request with an accent of deferential entreaty, which the person in whose behalf the prayer is offered could well dispense with. In answer the Sorceress picks up a slate, scrawled all over from top to bottom, and shakes her head importantly.

'I'm sure I've every wish to oblige the

lady—I always like to make things pleasant for my ladies--but it's no use my saying I can make it this week, for I can't.'

'Not *this* week!' cries Lesbia in a voice of deep disappointment. 'Do try to squeeze us in somewhere! I assure you that it is a very particular case!'

But the Sibyl is firm.

'I'm sure it is not my wish to be disobliging. No one can say it of me. But I never was so full up in my life. Such a power of ladies keep coming to me!'

'I know they do!'

'Do you happen to know Lady Camilla Blackett?'

'No; I do not, except by name.'

'Well, I foretold her ladyship's marriage.'

'Indeed.'

'So many ladies come to me, because they said they 'eard I had foretold her ladyship's marriage.'

'I have no doubt they did,' in a key of respectful belief.

'I did not know what they meant until

the other day, when a lady said to me, "That was a good shot you made about Lady Camilla Blackett's marriage;" and I said, "Indeed, I was not aware of 'aving done so;" and she said, "Why, do not you know that the old lady I brought to you last February was the Dowager-Duchess of Brackwell, her ladyship's mother, and you told her fortune by the cards, and told her that there was soon to be a wedding in her family; and then she gave you two letters to 'old, and when you took one of them into your 'and you said it was from a person who was shortly to be connected with her Grace, and that person was Mr. Blackett offering for Lady Camilla?"'

Lesbia looks triumphantly at her cousin.

'I hope you will do as well for us,' she cries eagerly; 'and if you positively cannot have us this week, you really must make it as early as possible next week.'

Again the slate is consulted, and after a pause of hesitation, whether to enhance the value of the ultimate concession, or from a genuine press of engagements, a day and

hour are suggested, and, after a joyful acceptance on the part of Lesbia, the visitors depart.

The wood pavement is even more slippery than on their arrival, but Mrs. Heathcote is far too much absorbed by the memory of their late interview to be any longer conscious of it.

'Isn't she wonderful?' asks she. 'Was not it extraordinary that she should have foretold Lady Camilla Blackett's marriage?'

'We have it only upon her own authority that she did,' replies Emma dryly. 'I remarked that she made sure that Lady Camilla was not an acquaintance of ours before she told the anecdote.'

'I cannot think why you and Tom did not marry each other,' exclaims Lesbia petulantly, 'you are such a pair of sceptics. Tom's first impulse when I tell him any fact is to prove to demonstration that it could not by any possibility have happened, and you are growing nearly as bad.'

But to the expression of a wonder which she is conscious of being able so easily to

allay, if she chose, Emma replies only by a small wise smile.

*   *   *   *   *

'You do not mind my having ordered the carriage half an hour earlier than usual?' is Mrs. Chantry's greeting to her niece on her return. 'There is only such a small pinch of daylight nowadays, and as there is no fog, I thought it would be a good day to go to Burlington House. I do not know much myself about archaically early Italian masters, but I am told there are wonderful specimens of the founders of the Siennese school there this year.' She is writing a note as she speaks, and adds a couple of lines and two commas before she perceives that her proposal remains unanswered. Her quill pauses.

'You do not rise to the idea of the Siennese?'

Emma has been facing her aunt, but during the last minute she has slidden round to the other side of the writing-table, and stands behind her.

'I always rise to your ideas; but—but could not the Siennese wait till to-morrow?'

'Why should they?'

'Because—because'—her hands are on Mrs. Chantry's shoulders, and there is a sound of hesitating persuasion in her voice —'because I have an engagement of my own for this afternoon.'

'Could not it wait till to-morrow?'

'Not—not very well.'

A pause.

'You do not appear to be going to reveal what it is, so I may as well go on with my note.'

There is a tinge of vexed dryness in her voice. Emma has walked to the fireplace.

'When one wants to do a thing which one knows that one's best friends will disapprove—as one thinks causelessly—can you understand the temptation to do it first and tell afterwards?'

'I will not be trapped into a generality; what are you going to do that I shall disapprove?'

'Perhaps you will not disapprove!' Her tone says how very little likely she thinks this hypothesis. 'But I—I am going to call

on Mrs. William Hatcheson—the mother of Mr. Hatcheson the writer. When I met him at Heathcote, I asked leave to make her acquaintance.'

The pregnant silence that follows this announcement proves to Emma that she has not miscalculated.

'I should have thought,' says Mrs. Chantry, in her slowest and most sarcastic voice, 'that the specimens with which you are already acquainted would have satisfied any but a very abnormal appetite for Mr. Hatcheson's relations!'

'I admire him so extremely—as a writer, of course—I have learned so much from his conversation, and I think so highly of his character, as far as I know it, that I am convinced the mother of such a man must be well worth knowing.'

'By the analogy of his uncle and aunt she undoubtedly must.'

The apparently irrefragable logic of this speech makes Emma lose somewhat her hold upon her tightly reined-in temper.

'It is of very little consequence what the

relations of a man of genius are,' she cries loftily, shifting her ground, 'since it is he that sheds lustre upon them, not they on him!'

Mrs. Chantry sees her advantage, nor is she slow to seize it.

'If it is of so very little consequence what his mother is, why are you so determined to rush into her acquaintance?'

'To tell her what I think of him! To thank her for having made him what he is!'

It is just to Miss Jocelyn to say that no sooner are these words out of her mouth, than she sees the highflown folly of them; nor is the consciousness weakened by Mrs. Chantry's derisive rejoinder:

'Ah, ce petit pigeon! c'est vous qui l'avez fait!'

Angry as they are, both break into a laugh, which clears the thundery air.

'No doubt I expressed it ridiculously, and you were quite right to jump upon me,' says Emma, with disarming candour, yet sticking to her point; 'but I think that the wish in itself was natural.'

'H'm!'

'If one admires very much a flower or a fruit, one likes to know the soil that produced it.'

'H'm!'

'I admire "Warp and Woof" *extremely*; and I wish to know the soil that produced *it*.'

'H'm!'

'If you were not so prejudiced against her I believe that I could convince you that she is just the kind of woman you would like,' says Emma, baffled by this series of inarticulate exclamations, which, as she feels, express nothing less than acquiescence.

Another follows, if possible more incredulous than its predecessors.

'H'm!'

'I mean to say'—growing rosy with the uphill task—'that from what her son told me of her—and he is quite incapable of misrepresentation—she possesses just those qualities which you most admire—power of self-sacrifice, endurance, independence of spirit!'

It is odd that anyone should refuse to be stirred by such a catalogue of unusual virtues, but Mrs. Chantry only leans back in her chair and says cavillingly:

'Are those the qualities that I most admire? And how has she shown them?'

'She has brought up a large family upon nothing at all!'

'H'm! She had no business to have them to bring up.'

'From the very outset she refused to be pauperized by her rich vulgar connections—the Hatchesons whom we know—who despised her for her poverty, although infinitely her inferiors in every other respect.'

'She is, then, besides being one of nature's noblewomen, a lady by birth?'

'Oh, undoubtedly!' with the more emphasis from the consciousness of how entirely by intuition this fact has been arrived at.

'Do you happen to know who she was?'

'No; I could not'—borrowing a shaft from her aunt's quiver—'question her own son as to her gentility.'

She turns slowly doorwards.

'At what time, then, shall I order the carriage? She will scarcely wish to see us at half-past two.'

'Us?'

'Yes, *us*. I am quite determined that I, too, will make the acquaintance of the mother of the Gracchi! I may never have such an opportunity again.'

CHAPTER XII.

It should always be gratifying to find that one has inoculated another with one's own cult for any object of admiration or worship, yet on the present occasion the proof given by Mrs. Chantry of conversion to her niece's views of the subject of discussion fills that niece with a feeling not far short of dismay. With what maimed rites will she have to offer her incense upon the altar of her choice, with the consciousness of a sceptic standing by scoffing at the swung censer! How, with the knowledge that her aunt's quick ear is pricked to catch the dulcet accents, will she be able to murmur her hymn of praise? What chance will there be of her being able to put all those reverently eager questions she

had planned to his mother, as to the details of her idol's childhood, the remarkable sayings of his infancy, the pastimes preferred by his boyhood, the exact date at which his fingers had first grasped the creative quill? If all these deeply interesting questions are to be stifled, if the outpouring of appreciative gratitude with which she had proposed to herself to irrigate his mother's bosom is to be dammed at its fount, of what use to pay the visit at all?

She will still, it is true, be able to see the author of that intelligence which has so deeply influenced her own, but under what tantalizing conditions of irksomeness and restraint!

'Mrs. Hatcheson does not expect you!' she says, in a voice, and with a countenance, which plainly indicate a falling barometer.

'She *does* expect you, then?'

'Yes; in answer to the message I sent her as to my wish to make her acquaintance, she wrote me a very kind note—it would be impossible to imagine a kinder note—fixing to-day.'

'H'm!'

'But, of course, neither she nor I made any mention of you.'

'It will be all the more an agreeable surprise for her;' and with this reflection, uttered with an air of cheerful resolution, the subject for the moment drops.

But it is a very crestfallen Emma that eats a luncheon spoilt and rendered tasteless to her, a very anxious Emma that sets a reluctant foot on the carriage step, and that drives in preoccupied silence, broken by bursts of galvanized talk, along the hateful endlessness of the Cromwell Road, which to her to-day seems short; and backwards and forwards through the half dozen vulgar streetlets which lead to the last Thule of Tregunter Road, a goal which the coachman respects himself too much to find without ostentatious difficulty.

Miss Jocelyn has carefully kept herself free from other engagements for this pregnant afternoon, so that her visit, as originally planned, may be prolonged with luxurious indefiniteness.

Surely anecdotes of Edgar's precocity in

the past, and the auguries of his career in the future, may well lead his mother and her up to and beyond tea-time.

How much her point of view is now changed is evidenced by one of her few remarks.

'We need not stay long, I suppose? You will not wish to make more than a short visit?'

'As long or as short as you please!' replies her aunt, with provoking obligingness.

Oh that this pliability had but been of earlier date, and applied to a different object! '*As long or as short as you please!*' There is no doubt in Emma's mind as to which she pleases, and she hastens to say so.

'Oh, I should think that ten minutes or a quarter of an hour will be ample!'

'Do not hurry away on my account. I shall be quite happy sitting by and listening,' says Mrs. Chantry, still more accommodatingly than before, and Emma, with revolt and death in her heart, thanks her for a concession by which she is firmly resolved not to profit.

'Bless me, he has to ask again!' continues the elder lady, as the coachman draws up for the twentieth time, and the footman hails a passing milkman; 'are you sure that there is such a street? It must have been an inhabitant of Tregunter Road who, when asked where it was, answered: "Go along the Cromwell Road till your cab-horse drops down dead, and then begin to inquire." Ah! here we are!'

* * * * *

Though the visit extends to rather beyond the limit proposed by the chief actor and sufferer in it, yet not much more than half an hour has elapsed before the two ladies are again in their carriage, and rolling in search of some outlying South Kensington acquaintances, whose existence their own presence in so unwontedly remote a district inspires them to remember.

At first their drive seems to threaten a silence even more unbroken than that which had marked their outward one. It is Mrs. Chantry who at last infringes it.

'Why,' asks she, in a voice of affable

speculation, 'do people of that kind always keep their lamps in their drawing-rooms?'

'I do not think I quite know what kind of people you mean,' rejoins Emma insincerely, while her heart swells within her at the thought that in their pilgrimage to a shrine it is only this ignoble detail of domestic government which has arrested her aunt's attention.

'I mean middle-class people generally.'

'I do not think'—with hot cheeks—'that I recognise the middle-classness in this case.'

'And why did they show us the dining-room?' continues Mrs. Chantry good-humouredly, ignoring her niece's elevated tone and colouring, and speaking in a key of unaffected surprise and curiosity.

'They knew that it would interest me extremely to see it, because he — Mr. Hatcheson—works there; and they not unnaturally concluded by your coming that you, too, were interested in him.'

Mrs. Chantry's eyebrows go up.

'Works there! Do you mean that he writes his books there? I can only hope

for his sake, then, that it is not generally so thickly peopled as it was to-day! I must own'—laughing a little—'that the number of the Gracchi took me by surprise.'

There being no need to answer this fleer, Emma entrenches herself in a swelling silence, and in two or three private sources of consolation, one of which is that in a brief respite from her aunt's eye and ear, procured by the eldest Miss Hatcheson gallantly throwing herself into the breach, and engaging that Argus' attention, she, Emma, has been able to glean from Edgar's mother a few poor ears of the rich harvest she had promised herself of characteristic facts as to the dawn of that day which now dazzles her by its noonday glare.

She leaves 404, Tregunter Road, richer at least than she entered it by the knowledge that at eighteen months old he had pronounced several little words quite distinctly; and that when he had the measles at four and a half he had had more of them than was ever known in the case of any authentic child of genius before. She is musing over

this and kindred themes when her aunt's voice again breaks upon her ear.

'She seems a very good sort of little body in her way!' says Mrs. Chantry, as if making a handsome concession; 'but I can't quite forgive her for being so prolific! they are terribly thick upon the ground!'

The form of encomium adopted in the first half of this sentence seems to Miss Jocelyn so shocking in its condescension, that the indignation it excites gives her the impetus requisite for rushing upon a communication which she had meant to have somewhat delayed.

'They will be rather "thicker" still upon the ground next week!'

'Will they?' not perceiving the ominous tocsin sound of the words in which this announcement—with so little of personal application to Mrs. Chantry as it would seem—are made. 'Will they? I suppose you mean that your protégé will be at home, too! Where on earth will they put him?'

'No,' replies Emma, with slow resolution;

'I was not alluding to my protégé, as you call him; though'—reddening—'if there is any question of "protecting" between us, I am far more his protégé than he mine! I was'—(a slight hesitation shows the quailing of the flesh)—'thinking and speaking of myself!'

If Emma has expected that her aunt will receive this statement with an astonished repetition of its last word, or a new series of those 'H'ms!' which had so disconcerted her before luncheon, she is mistaken. Mrs. Chantry only turns fully towards her; every feature, from iron-gray eyes to humorous resolved mouth, so full of astonishment as to leave as yet no room for the displeasure so soon to dawn in them at the further unfolding of her niece's project. That large mute gaze introduces a flurry, which she herself is vexedly conscious of, into Emma's next sentence.

'His mother happened to mention to me that Edgar—Mr. Hatcheson'—an angry flash at the glib Christian name from the listener's wide-opened orbs is the cause of

this rapid change of title—'is to lecture at the Hammersmith Institute upon "Blake" next week, and I expressed such an eager desire to hear him, that she most good-naturedly invited me to stay two nights in order to go with them to it.'

Another complete silence. Emma would now be thankful for one of the ejaculations which had so rasped her spirit earlier in the day. At last, in a voice as many degrees below freezing as the temperature of the hard-bound road on which the horses' hoofs are ringing, Mrs. Chantry puts a question :

'I am to understand that you have accepted the invitation?'

'Yes.'

A dialogue in which the speakers' utterances either cut off one another's tails, or, worse still, allow a lurid minute or minutes to elapse between each round of firing, is generally not an enjoyable one. They are bowling down Queen's Gate before the ping of Mrs. Chantry's next bullet is heard. It is not the less a bullet, that it is wrapped in a quasi-jest.

'You remind me of a friend of mine who told me of a room in South London which she visited, and where a family lived in each corner, and one in the middle. They all told her that they were very comfortable, unless the middle family *took a lodger!*'

When you are braced for deadly fight, there is no weapon that comes so amiss to you as a jest; and this one brings Miss Jocelyn's defences so low, that she is actually reduced to murmuring something about 'plain living and high thinking,' which falls with inexpressible flatness not less on her own than on her listener's ear.

'With all due deference to Milton'—retorts her aunt dryly—'I never could see that there was any necessary connection between the two: you may have a very bad cook and very grovelling ideas!'

This is so incontestable that the ireful junior has to leave it undisputed, and again there is a bout of silence. Again it is the elder who puts a term to it.

'Has it never occurred to you that the way in which you are throwing yourself into the

arms of people of this cl—— of these people may land you in consequences that you do not reckon upon? Or do you reckon upon them?'

'The implication is an insult to me and to them!' replies Emma, in a lacerated voice, and turning her head so completely away that only a rim of boiling cheek remains exposed to her companion's eye.

But the latter sticks to her guns.

'I do not see it! Were I the young man's mother, I should certainly think that but one interpretation could be put upon——'

But Emma breaks in.

'Do not say something that we can neither of us ever forget!' she cries tragically; then changing her tone to one as of laborious patient appeal to the latent reasoning powers of a person hopelessly wrong-headed: 'Is it possible that you cannot believe in the existence of such a relation as that between teacher and taught? Did you never yourself when you were young wish to sit at the feet of someone wiser and better than you?'

'Never. I always preferred a chair of my own.'

This unexpected reply reduces Miss Jocelyn to the condition of one who, having learnt off by heart the questions and answers of a dialogue book in a foreign language, is, when he comes to employ them, met by a response other than the printed one.

'If I had ever felt such an inclination,' continues Mrs. Chantry, 'I should at least have made quite sure that my teacher *was* wiser and better than I.'

'If you had ever given yourself the trouble to inquire into the subject, you would not have felt much uncertainty on that head,' replies Emma, with a humility which her aunt finds even more trying than her opposition; 'but I did hope' (quiveringly) 'that you knew me better than to outrage me by suspicions which—which——'

'I begin to think that I have never known you at all!' interrupts her aunt in a tone, the real pain of whose gravity has so entirely swamped her characteristically innocent surface cynicism that Emma's conscience smites her. Grossly as her aunt is misconceiving her, hopelessly at fault as is her

usually penetrating acuteness, hard as it is to have one's wings clipped because, in the natural course of their growth and expansion, they have outsoared the pinionless fosterer of one's immaturity, yet her affection for that outgrown and outflown guide is still much too hearty not to outweigh annoyance at her limitations.

A moment's meditation brings Miss Jocelyn's hand sliding out of her own muff and into her aunt's.

'You certainly do not know me,' she says sweetly and dutifully, 'if you think I am going to persevere in what is evidently a matter of such profound annoyance to you. I knew you would be a *little* vexed, but I did not mind that' (her tone growing lighter, as she sees the relaxing of her companion's muscles). 'I thought that that would be rather good for you'—a smile takes the sting out of this last mild impertinence—'but this is evidently no case of "a little." We will say no more about it. As soon as we get home, I will write to Mrs. Hatcheson to excuse myself. I will not go!'

The renunciation is gracefully made, and deserves an equivalent acceptance; but at first it gets none, nor even any answer. At last:

'As my muff is not licensed to carry three hands, will you mind removing yours?' Mrs. Chantry says dryly, but with the never long absent beam of humour stealing back into her eye. 'You are a good child, though your head is full of maggots. But I will not accept your sacrifice; it would not be fair, and, besides, I have altered my mind. Go and stay your two nights—stay three nights if they ask you. Stay a week in Tregunter Road!'

The beam of good-humour that lights the elder lady's face as she gives this permission leaves no doubt as to its sincerity; but there is something in the quality of her sunshine that prevents Emma from basking quite comfortably in its rays.

* * * * *

The day has come for the solving of Miss Jocelyn's literary enigma by the Witch of Marylebone, and though to Lesbia she tries to treat the whole affair with a light pooh-

pooh, as a playful trifle engaged in only to oblige her cousin, yet she cannot help feeling a sense of eager expectation, of which she is cordially ashamed, and which she tries to quench, or at least conceal, by scoffing expressions of incredulity en route.

The hansom of their former visit is exchanged for Lesbia's brougham, which, for fear of its giving a clue to their identity, is to be quitted at a hundred yards or so from the door, to which they are to proceed on foot. The greater privacy and less outlook of a brougham lends itself to more intimate converse than the noisy publicity of a hansom, and Lesbia's mood seems to harmonize with the change.

'You may deride the whole thing as much as you please,' she says, with a greater seriousness than is usual with her, 'but I, at least, have every reason to know how much there is in it—what startlingly true things about one's self it tells one.'

'What sort of things?'

'Things that no human being but one's self could by any possibility have known.'

Her tone is so mysterious that Emma laughs.

'You have not been vouchsafed any very special revelation lately, have you?' she asks jokingly.

But Mrs. Heathcote still preserves her unwonted dignity of gravity.

'Mr. McDougall——'

'Is he back?'—in a key which evidences no very pronounced gratification. 'I hoped —I thought that he had gone to Egypt for the winter.'

'So he had. He had no intention of coming back before March, but he could not help it. *They* drove him home.'

'*They?* Who?'

'The guides—the spirits, I mean.

'Psha!'

'You may say "Psha!" but that does not alter the fact. When he came to see me, he at once asked leave to look at my hand again' (unfolding her own little ungloved palm as she speaks, and regarding it with respectful interest). 'He said that there had always been something he did not under-

stand in it—something incongruous, out of keeping, that did not tally with what he knew of my character and history.'

'Indeed! And pray what was it?'

Lesbia hesitates, and a slight blush suffuses her face, under the Russian net of her accurately put-on veil.

'He said that—that—the fact which he read most plainly in my lines was that it is only within the last year that I have met the person who has roused, or will rouse, my —my deepest feelings.'

'That is pleasant hearing for Tom,' says Emma, with a dryness in no way inferior to that with which Mrs. Chantry has received some of her own flights.

'Pooh! what would he care?' rejoins Lesbia, with a shrug. 'He would be very much embarrassed to know what to do with anyone's deepest feelings if he had them.'

The strain is such a new one, though on reflection Miss Jocelyn recalls having of late heard one or two notes of it, and in such discord with the tune so lightly and affectionately carolled by Lesbia up to her acquaint-

ance with the Black Art, and its oft-quoted apostle, Mr. McDougall, that a fresh access of repentance at being herself now tampering with a science which has so laid low the common-sense of her cousin seizes Emma. It makes her first aghastly silent, and then drives her into energetic speech.

'I never heard such wicked bosh!'

Lesbia colours, but she is too radically good-tempered to make an angry retort; yet her rejoinder, when it does come, though escorted by a good-humoured and perfectly unrancorous smile, plants a sting in her companion's heart such as no blustering expression of resentment could have done.

'You may pretend that you have no sympathy with romance and—and passion, and that sort of thing, and I certainly never used to suspect you of it; you kept it uncommonly dark; but since "Miching Mallecho," since we have what you really feel in chapter and verse, put into the mouths of Odo and Elfrida—— Ah! here we are! What a good thing!'—with a light laugh. 'A brougham is not a nice place for a stand-up fight, and we were fast getting to that.'

But there is no lightness in Emma's spirit, as, in mute distress, she follows her companion through the promptly-opened door into the Fane. Nor do her spirits rise even when invited to seat herself on a vulgar walnut chair, and draw up to the table in order to learn her fate.

Lesbia, silent with excitement, follows her example, as does also Mrs. Smith—the arbiter of destiny boasts no more mystic name.

The séance is to begin with the ordeal by cards, and the Sibyl, taking a not particularly fresh-complexioned pack into her hand, deals out the pictured arbiters of Miss Jocelyn's destiny slowly and solemnly in three rows before her. You might hear a pin drop while her eye travels over the parti-coloured lines.

'I see money!' she says slowly.

Despite Emma's alleged incredulity, she is conscious of a slight pang of disappointment. She has always been so comfortably lapped in an abundance of all the goods that money brings; it has, for as long as she can remember, been so much a matter of course

that none of her reasonable wishes should be balked of fulfilment by want of funds to accomplish them, that it seems to her as if she were indeed wasting her time if she have come here merely to hear the self-evident platitude that she is well oft.

'I see money—a good deal now!'—she looks up inquiringly, and Emma gives an indifferent nod of acquiescence—'and more by-and-by; is that so?'

'Ye-es, I suppose so.'

The assent is a reluctant one; since the promised addition to her fortune is to be a consequence of her aunt's death, and the idea of even distantly alluding to such a calamity under such conditions and in such company as the present, fills her with repugnance.

Another pause. More eye-travelling over the marshalled array of bedizened royalties and their soberer subjects.

'Though you are young, you have already had a good deal of sorrow. Is that so?'

An emphatic denial is hovering on Miss Jocelyn's lips, so full of calm sunshine does her past present itself in retrospect.

A good deal of sorrow? why, now that she comes to think of it, has she in all her twenty-three years ever been asked even to sip of Sorrow's cup?

'I do not think I have ever—— ('had any sorrow at all,' is the end she had meant to have given her sentence); but Lesbia interposes eagerly:

'That is perfectly true; you have had a great deal of sorrow lately—quite lately! I am sure you would be the last person to deny *that;* I mean'—as the dubious look still lingers on her cousin's face—'within the last three months.'

Then at length accepting the allusion to her literary collapse, Emma acquiesces with dejected dignity:

'Yes, I have had a good deal of sorrow!'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE fact of Miss Jocelyn's acquaintance with woe having been established, they go on.

'You have an enemy!'

Emma is conscious that Lesbia is making a rustling movement expressive of delighted agitation beside her; and a slight, though instantly self-rebuked, thrill passes over herself.

''Ave you an enemy?'

'I—I had rather not answer that question just yet. If I have an enemy, I suppose you can give some description of the—the person?'

She chooses this neutral word in order not to commit herself to a personal pronoun which would reveal the sex of her hypothetical adversary.

'It is a woman.'

The assertion that if a young and handsome girl have an enemy it is one of her own sex, is generally likely to be a safe one; but Emma has neither fatuity nor presence of mind enough to apply this truth, and she gives a slight start.

'A dark woman—at least between the two—certainly not fair!'

Lesbia has grasped her cousin's hand under the table.

'No, that she is not!' she says in a violent whisper; '*certainly not fair!*'

But Emma frowns her into silence, and in a voice which, despite her best efforts, has a slight quiver in it, asks:

'Can you give me any indication as to why this rather dark woman is my enemy, and how she has shown it?'

The answer is a minute or so in coming, while the interpreter of fate diligently scans the red and black enigmas before her; but when it does it brings disappointment, as it introduces the inevitable fair man, with whom it seems that the rather dark woman is some-

how mixed up, and though Lesbia noiselessly mouths something, which Miss Jocelyn rather guesses than sees to represent the words, '*Your little scribbler*,' she shakes an unbelieving head.

The colouring of hair or skin is an immaterial detail in a friendship between two intelligences, but yet Emma is as well aware as of the tint of her own locks that there is nothing of the insipidly blond about the eyes or the complexion of her favourite author.

Mrs. Smith either does not perceive the signs of expressed dissent, or drives over them relentlessly in her car of destiny. The fair man is followed by the usual journeys, obstacles, etc., and the crowning insult to credulity is reached in the final vulgarity of a promised wedding, to which Miss Jocelyn listens with a lip curled in disdainful unbelief.

The second method of divination is now tried, when, the cards being again gathered up, the fortune-teller puts into Emma's hand the wish-card—the nine of hearts—and bids

her wish. There must be a grain of belief in these means of interrogating the future lurking in the inquirer's mind, since at this command she obviously hesitates. Were she convinced that the whole thing were a mummery, a child's play, it would be of no consequence what she wished, whereas her slightly-flushing face and parted lips prove that she is in obvious anxiety as to the response to a very ardently cherished desire.

At length she says in a low voice, 'I have wished;' whereupon the card is returned to the pack, and after the latter has been three times cut, Mrs. Smith deals out the cards afresh, three at a time, making remarks upon each trio as they appear.

'Money, plenty of money.' Emma gives an impatient shrug. 'A short journey, very short; not much of one; scarcely a journey at all.'

The impatience in Miss Jocelyn's face gives way to a look of attention. Of course, it is merely an accidental coincidence, but the description applies with curious ac-

curacy to her proposed visit to Tregunter Road.

'The rather dark woman again. A fair man—not the same one as before; something disagreeable connected with him. Ah, here is the wish-card. You have your wish, but,' looking at the cards which flank the indicated nine of hearts on either hand—'it is in the middle of the three—you get it with a death attached to it.'

Emma starts.

'A death!' she repeats in an aghast voice. 'Are you sure that it *is* a death? Are you quite certain that you have not made a mistake?'

'I never make mistakes,' replies the Sibyl shortly.

The crystal ball follows. It is like a large billiard-ball in glass, and Mrs. Smith, taking it into the palm of her hand, stares solemnly into it, while the two girls hold their breath.

'I see a room, a small room; rather bare; nothing much on the walls; some chairs and a table, and a dark woman.'

'A woman? You are sure it is a woman, not a man?'

'A dark woman,' repeats Mrs. Smith with a gesture of displeasure at being interrupted. 'She has something in her hand; it looks like a pen. She is bending over the table writing.'

Both girls start.

'You are sure?' breaks in Emma hastily, regardless of the evidence of disapprobation that had attended her former interruption; but Lesbia quells her by pinching her arm and whispering eagerly:

'You put her out; let her finish.'

Apparently, however, she has finished, for having been staring intently all this time into the ball, she now passes her hand over her eyes.

'There,' she says, 'it is all swimming away. I cannot look any more; it strains my eyes so.'

There is nothing more to be got out of either her or her crystal. Their audience is ended, and as a powerful ring at the little vulgar front-door bell now announces the

advent of new inquirers, they have to withdraw, and, passing two very smart ladies on the doorstep, take their way back to the brougham.

'You see how répandue she is,' is the remark that the strangers elicit from Mrs. Heathcote. 'I wonder what they have come to find out, and whether they will be as successful as we have been?'

'*Have* we been successful?'

'Do you mean to say that you doubt it?' turning a face of unmitigated astonishment tinged with indignation upon the expresser of the hesitation. 'A dark woman writing; could anything be more explicit?'

'It was a curious coincidence,' replies Emma musingly, 'if it was a coincidence, because, even if she had discovered who we were, that would have given her no clue, since no one knows of my having any connection with literature.'

'No-o-o; at least, hardly anyone.'

'No one except Aunt Chantry, you, and Tom, and none of you are likely, I should hope, to have betrayed me.'

They are in the carriage by this time, and Lesbia is pulling up her window. There seems to be a little difficulty in raising the glass, and it is only after a minute's pause that she answers :

'Of course not!'

'That was the only thing that in the least impressed me! As for the usual farrago of fair men and obstacles and journeys—— By-the-bye' (interrupting her own flow of contemptuous enumeration), 'it was a little curious about the very small journey, too."

'You are to get your wish, but with a death attached to it!' says Mrs. Heathcote, repeating the prediction with a luxurious sort of 'creep' in her voice. 'Whose, I wonder? The Grimston's, do you think? For I suppose that what you wished was to be properly revenged on her!'

Emma makes a gesture of disgusted negation.

'You know how little belief I have in the whole mummery! But my wish—such as it was—had no reference to her.'

'You do not say so! What did you wish, then?'

'I—I had rather not tell you.'

'Shall you tell Aunt Chantry?'

'No.'

'Shall not you tell anybody?'

'No.'

'Never?'

'If it comes to pass' (with a slight sigh)—'but I am afraid that is not very likely—I may tell you; in fact, I promise to do so.'

'*If* it is fulfilled, when will it be—soon?'

'I cannot hazard a guess.'

'Is it anything that you have much at heart?'

'Ye-es; a good deal.'

'Is it——'

'We are not playing a game of "How, When, and Where"' (laughing, yet decidedly), 'and I decline to answer any more questions.'

She is obdurate, and Lesbia has to content herself during the remainder of the drive by exhaustive suggestions of every desire that could agitate a female heart, and by con-

jectures built upon the expression of her cousin's face as to whether she has hit upon the right one.

Mrs. Chantry, when the morning's adventures are narrated to her, treats them with her usual common-sense.

'If you had given me your guinea, I could have told you quite as much as you have learnt. I never had any doubt that various men with different coloured hair had a penchant for you; nor that that horrible Grimston gave the coup de grâce to your unlucky book. But even if you gained a little more certainty on that head, since she is not a man, and you are not a man, and you cannot kick her downstairs, I do not see how much *forrarder* you are!'

Emma asks herself the same question a great many times during the next few days, hovering between faint faith and stout unbelief. She is asking it and one or two others, to which there are as yet no very satisfactory answers, on the morning of the day which is to witness her flight into South Kensington.

The scene of her reflections is one that does not usually lend itself to peaceful musings: a grimy railway-carriage on the Underground, in which she is returning with her maid from a second-hand book-hunting excursion into the City. There is no reason why she should not have taken a hansom or the brougham; but of late, for some occult reason, into which Mrs. Chantry is afraid to inquire too curiously, she has shown a preference for the less luxurious modes of conveyance, and has been practising various apparently objectless small asceticisms.

'Are you training for Tregunter?' has asked Mrs. Chantry in rather tart alliteration when her niece had at breakfast announced her intention of using the Metropolitan Line a good deal in future, and Emma has replied with that pink-coloured moral grandeur which the mention of the suburban road in question always evokes:

'We are so self-indulgent! I do not want to be chained all my life to the car of my bodily comforts, the slave of my habits! We ought not really to have *any* habits!'

And as she shuts the door upon this splendid generalization, her aunt has no chance of picking holes in it.

The Metropolitan Railway cannot be accused of erring on the side of an excess of bodily comfort, but at this time of day—towards twelve o'clock—it is at its least offensive. Its noble army of commercial gentlemen having been already landed at their ledgers, there is only a couple of inoffensive women to disturb by their presence Miss Jocelyn's self-questionings as they burrow in company through the smoky tunnels, and bring up with a limb-dislocating jerk at the dirty platforms.

At one of the stations, to which they have pulled up with an almost more nauseating shock than usual, Emma's view of the three huge advertisements on the wall immediately opposite to her—viz., a parlour-maid, such as no sane person would have engaged, staring at her own grinning image in a spoon, in praise of plate-powder; a row of persons, whom it seems a thousand pities to have kept alive, dancing grotesquely, hand-in-hand,

to show the revivifying influence of Bouillon Fleet; and thirdly, a wrenched and prostituted sentence of Shakespeare's puffing a 'People's Soap'—her view of these works of art is suddenly obscured by a figure which might have joined them without doing discredit to them or to herself, that of the person at the very moment occupying her thoughts — Miss Grimston. This lady scrambles into the carriage as the train is in motion, and is at first too much out of breath to be able to do more than utter the ejaculation, aimed at no one in particular:

'I *had* a run for it!' But presently recovering herself, and recognising her vis-à-vis, she cries out her name with an intonation of pleasure: 'Miss Jocelyn! this *is* luck! And how did you leave that dear old mediæval survival, where I had the pleasure of meeting you and all those good ladies who were so scandalized at me? Ha! ha! What an appalling audience they would make! I am glad I shall not have such "iced slugs" to address to-day! By-the-bye, are you coming?'

'Coming where?'

'To the meeting at St. James's Hall to-day, two o'clock, doors open at 1.30.'

'I am afraid I do not quite know what meeting you are alluding to.'

'Why, the reception we are going to give to Miss Mathilde P. O'Connell, the Irish-American delegate! It was she who initiated the whole movement across the water! You must have heard of her!'

'I am afraid I have not.'

Since her last meeting with its Apostle, the 'Regeneration of Man' has occupied so limited a space in Miss Jocelyn's memory that it is a moment or two before she grasps the fact that it is to this great social upheaval that her interlocutor is alluding.

'You do not say so! Well, we are going to give her quite an ovation! You will be sorry afterwards if you do not come.'

'Shall I? But I am afraid I am already engaged! Are *you* going to speak?'

'I should rather think I am! Why, I am to move the vote of thanks from the Federated Women of Great Britain and Ireland!

You had better throw over your engagement and come and hear me.'

Emma shakes her head.

'Unfortunately that is impossible.'

'I think I can promise you that you would be impressed! No doubt you have seen that I have been lecturing lately all over the place? No? You do not say so!' (with unaffected surprise). 'Why, every blank wall has been covered with my posters!'

Is the slight blush that is stealing over the cheeks of Miss Grimston's listener, as revealed by the sickly yellow lamp, the result of the trumpet-call of this fierce Evangel; or is it the outcome of an idea which has found birth in her own mind, and now glides hesitatingly into speech?

It seems to her that she is as subtle as Machiavel, and as hypocritical as Tartuffe, when she hears herself saying, in a concerned voice:

'I am afraid that, if you have been so busy lecturing, you must have been neglecting your literary work a good deal.'

'Do not you believe it,' replies the other

familiarly; 'not one little bit; you may trust my uncle for that. He would know the reason why pretty quick if I did!'

'Oh, then you *do* review for the *Porch!*' cries Emma, springing like a cat on a mouse upon the admission of what at her former asking Miss Grimston had shirked confessing with so determined though facetiously clad an excuse.

'Who says that I write for the *Porch?*' returns the other sharply.

Miss Jocelyn looks full at her. Upon her face, surmounted by an all-wrong bonnet, there is an undoubted smile of self-satisfaction underlying the shallow surface repudiation, and as Emma sees its dawn and expansion her last fragment of doubt as to the identity of her present companion with the dark woman-enemy writing in Mrs. Smith's crystal ball, and with the perpetrator of the brutal slasher in the great review, vanishes.

'Who says that I review for the *Porch?*' repeats Miss Grimston, thinking that her question had been lost in the noise of the train.

'*I* say it!' answers Emma, with indescribable dignity, and as at the same moment a sudden sickening jar acquaints her with the fact that she has reached the station for which she is bound, she opens the door and gets out, favouring the friendly-intentioned and puzzled 'Regenerator' with a parting bow whose quality would not have misbeseemed the 'iced slugs' of whom that lady had made earlier mention.

Emma had meant to have returned straight home, but as it is not near luncheon-time she cannot resist the temptation of paying Lesbia a morning visit in order to impart to her the new certainty at which she has arrived upon a subject in which, to do her justice, Mrs. Heathcote's warmth of interest is inferior only to her own.

Arrived at Mrs. Heathcote's door, her would-be visitor is surprised by a sort of respectful resistance to her entrance on the part of the butler. Usually she walks into her cousin's house as a matter of course, either to find her or to await her, to play with her children, or write notes at her

writing-table. The same reciprocal intimacy has existed since their birth, and any bar to it surprises her as much as it would do to find the door of her own house closed to her.

'Has Mrs. Heathcote gone out driving?'

'No, 'm.'

'Is she out walking?'

'No, 'm.'

'She is not ill?'

'No, 'm.'

'Is she in the drawing-room?'

'I'll see, 'm.'

'Oh, you need not, I will see for myself,' replies Emma, walking past him and up the stairs.

She is conscious that he is making some sort of remonstrances at her back, but she is so certain that no closing of Lesbia's door can have any application to her that she disregards them, and, springing lightly up the stairs, opens one of the double doors and enters a room which is as familiar to her as her aunt's.

There are circumstances connected with its present aspect which are not familiar to her,

It is not usual for Lesbia to be at one o'clock in the day lying back in a long, low, easy-chair, dressed in a tea-gown, and with a pocket-handkerchief pressed to her eyes, and Miss Jocelyn's mind is crossed by a devout yet doubting hope that it is not usual for a gentleman, for whom she herself has often avowed her lack of appreciation, to be seated at Mrs. Heathcote's feet, reading aloud to her.

As the door opens Emma is aware of an impatient exclamation from Lesbia, and hears Mr. McDougall's voice saying, 'Here she is! What a strange coincidence!' At the same instant he advances, with an empressement she could dispense with, to meet her, while Lesbia struggles up out of her chair, guilt and fear written large upon her pretty face.

'What is a coincidence?' asks Emma politely, for she is always polite, but in a key that can scarcely be called expansive.

'We were reading,' begins Mr. McDougall, and then stops short, and a treacherous glance opposite reveals to the visitor

the cause of his abrupt halt, in the vigorous signs of prohibition that are being addressed to him behind her own back by his hostess, who now rapidly picks up the ball of conversation which she had forced him to drop.

'How did you manage to get in? I told Hemmings not to admit anybody, and I forgot to except you. I have had one of my theatre headaches. I tottered downstairs only about an hour ago, and Mr. McDougall has kindly been trying to read me well. It is very dissipated of us to be reading a novel in the morning, but we have got hold of such an excellent one. It is called "Miching Mallecho," by an anonymous author; have you seen it?'

Mingled with the undoubted fright in Lesbia's lately wet eye, there is a gleam of as undoubted impudent fun; and Emma, seeing, or thinking she sees, an answering glimmer in McDougall's, jumps, with unspeakable indignation, to the conclusion that her secret has been betrayed to the person of all others from whose desecrating keeping she would have most disgustedly guarded it.

But her wrath, besides being unspeakable, is speechless, and Mrs. Heathcote runs on:

'We had just got to that passage where they are trying to say good-bye, and she is backing from him towards the door, which opens without her noticing it, and she backs on to the husband, who, heartless brute, intercepts Odo's last look. I never can help crying when I get to that point; but perhaps'—her natural audacity asserting itself against the very real tremors awakened by the expression of Emma's face—'perhaps you have not read it!'

There is a slight and sulphurous pause.

'If I had not,' replies Miss Jocelyn, regaining voice, but not much of it, though what there is, if low, is inexpressibly severe, 'I certainly should not have been induced by your précis to do so.'

And she walks, trembling with indignation, to the window. They may make what collusive grimaces they choose behind her back; she is past regarding them.

Whether or no the movement is the result

of such pantomime, or of the young man's applying to his own case the axiom that discretion is the better part of valour, the next thing that hits the outraged author's ear is a subdued farewell to Lesbia on the part of her swain, followed by swift footsteps doorwards.

No sooner has he removed his affectionate manner and artificial voice, than the ladies clear their decks for action. The advantage, if advantage it is, of the first shot is with Emma.

'I could not have believed it of you!' she says, retracing her steps towards her opponent, and speaking in that silky murmur, which in her case is the vehicle of the deepest ire. It is the token of displeasure so profound that Mrs. Heathcote has heard it but once or twice in all the peaceful years spent alongside of each other; but yet the echo of that once or twice has remained in her ear enough for her to recognise the battle-signal. Reluctantly (for Mars is not her tutelar god) she prepares to return fire.

'I do not know what you mean.'

'I never could have credited that you would have betrayed me.'

'I—I--do not know what you are talking about.'

'That you would have betrayed me to *Mr. McDougall.*'

The excessive scorn with which the name of her chosen friend is pronounced infuses at this point into Lesbia's responses a pinch of that spirit which perhaps a consciousness of the badness of her cause has hitherto made conspicuous by its absence.

'I did not tell him; he guessed it! I thought it showed very great acuteness on his part, considering how little personal acquaintance he has with you.'

'It will not be with my goodwill that that little ever becomes more.'

'I have no reason for supposing that he wishes it either; but very early in the first volume he guessed that you were the author. He taxed me with it; would you have had me tell a lie?'

To one who is steeped in the poets there are very few conjunctures in life for which

our Shakespeare has not something that fits, and at her cousin's last words there springs to Emma's memory the dazed appeal of Antony's heckled messenger to Cleopatra, who has been boxing him so soundly for his ill news, 'Should I lie, madam?' She would fain make Cleopatra's response,

> 'Oh, I would thou didst
> So half my Egypt were submerged and made
> A cistern for scaled snakes.'

Miss Jocelyn would far prefer that Chantry should be made 'a cistern for scaled snakes' than that her sacred secret should sleep or wake in McDougall's unworthy ear. But instead of using the Greek woman's immortal repartee, she puts her lacerated feelings into a stinging ejaculation all her own.

'If you were to betray me, why at least must it be to Mr. McDougall, of all people? I had far rather that you had told it to a sweeper in the street than to him!'

'It would not have interested him nearly so much!' retorts Lesbia with angry levity; 'you have always been grossly unjust to Mr.

McDougall. He is the most out-and-out admirer that you—I mean your book—possesses. He goes beyond me; for he admires those very passages that I have always thought rather strong!'

CHAPTER XIV.

It is a well-known fact that a blunt knife gives a worse cut than a sharp one, and that the sting of the amiable amateur bee rankles more than that of the spiteful professional wasp. In the same way when a habitually gentle tongue inflicts a wound, it is generally a far deeper one than that given by an invariable stinger and slasher.

Very seldom does Lesbia wield a knife; but she has got one now, and almost quite accidentally has dealt a frightful gash with it. The idea that those passages in Emma's work, of which, though still conscious of her singleness of heart in writing them, she has by reason of the frowardness of the world been secretly but deeply repenting, should

be recommended to her as beslobbered by Mr. McDougall's praise, is overwhelmingly repellent. It renders her for a second time speechless, which gives her cousin the not very happy opportunity for continuing in the same strain.

'He told me that long before he knew that you had written a novel—the very first time that he met you, he saw it in you—he divined it!'

'He saw—what? he divined—what?'

'He divined that you had the sort of tempera—— capabilities of pas—— he saw—he saw "Miching Mallecho" in you, in short!'

For all answer Emma falls on her knees beside the sofa, near which she is standing, and, hiding her face in her hands, bursts into bitter tears.

For a moment Lesbia stands shocked into total dumbness; then, for the water is never far from her eyes, throws herself down beside her cousin, and weeping plentifully, stammers out incoherent apologies.

'I only said it to tease you! I dare say that he does not admire them nearly so much

as he pretends; and in any case you did not know—Tom always says you had not an idea—what they implied.'

Whether this latter reassurance, which she has been given once or twice before without seeming sensibly exhilarated by it, has any healing power in the present crisis or no, Emma sobs and shakes on.

'I declare I sometimes wish, beautiful as it is—with my dying breath I shall maintain that it is the most beautiful love-story I ever read—that you had not written it! It has brought *so* much unhappiness in its train!'

It is possible that the aspiration may find an echo in Miss Jocelyn's breast, but she still remains obdurately silent.

They are thus kneeling side by side, sobbing lustily, with the heels of their shoes presented to any incomer, the matron piteously soliciting the forgiveness which the maid dumbly denies, when the door behind them opens, and the butler ushers, or means to usher, in something masculine, which apparently, on catching sight of the posture of affairs, hurriedly retreats, mutter-

ing something indistinctly of going up to the nursery.

'I shall sack Hemmings!' cries Lesbia, springing to her feet, and speaking in a brisk voice, which contrasts oddly with her streaming cheeks. 'What does he mean when I shut my door by letting in the butcher, the baker and the candlestick-maker? Oh, but I see it is luncheon-time! I told him that he might admit people for luncheon. We have actually been at it hammer and tongs for a whole hour! Who was it? George Greville? He matters less than anyone else would. He is never surprised at anything, and he is as full of tact as he can hold together.'

Emma is standing also by this time, sopping up the rain of her tears with an inadequate bit of cambric, and pulling down her veil.

'I must ask you to allow me to ring for a hansom,' she says.

'You may ask,' cries Lesbia, whose always indifferent guns have long been dismounted and spiked, 'but you will not get it. Oh, do not let the fog' (with a tearful-giggling

glance at the window) 'go down upon our wrath! *Do*—DO stay to luncheon! If you do not, George Greville—of course he has come to luncheon—will think that you are still displeased with him. Ah!'—seeing a flash of surprise in her cousin's eyes—'you did not think I knew it; but do you suppose that I have not perceived that you have had a froid with him all these weeks? I have not an idea what it is about; but you cannot wish to quarrel really with dear old George? You cannot want to quarrel with all your friends? You never used' (with a rueful twitch of the nether lip) 'to wish to quarrel with anyone!'

There must be some cogency in these arguments, since Emma, though she still steadily adheres to her resolution not to break bread or cutlets in a house where such an outrage has been offered to her self-respect, finally consents to the compromise of going up to the nursery to see the children, which is no departure from her invariable habits, taking the off-chance of finding a visitor there before her.

'But I am not fit to be seen!' she murmurs in final demurrer.

'What *does* that matter?' replies Lesbia, not disputing the assertion. 'Why, it is only old George! Has not he seen us both in every possible stage of mental and physical dishevelment ever since we were born?'

For the first time in her life the prospect of meeting 'old George' is quickening the beat of Emma's healthy heart. After their last hostile parting, after the sudden and total snapping of a life-long, easy intimacy, with what looks of subdued yet still glowing resentment, with what constrained and formal words of chilly surface-politeness will he greet her? Shall she bow her pride to the effort of mollifying him? It will be difficult and disagreeable; but will it not be worth while? It is useless—to herself, at least—to deny that she has missed him a good deal.

What he does say to her, rising from a chair before the tall nursery fender, and setting down a reluctant little girl with hurried care on the hearthrug, is:

'Well, Emma, this *is* luck!'

The words are almost identical with those uttered by Miss Grimston on the District Railway; but they wake a very different degree of emotion. The extreme and cheerful kindness of his tone, coupled with the tenderness of her own spirits after so great a shock, go nigh to upset again her scarce regained equanimity.

She has for some time recognised that, gross as was the misconception that had caused their quarrel—she is quite as convinced as ever of its deplorable grossness—it could only have been a disinterested regard for her welfare that had induced a man not given to meddle in his neighbours' affairs, and for whom her making or not making a fool of herself could have no personal importance, to take upon himself so disagreeable an office. She ought to have thanked instead of virtually showing him the door. His want of appreciation of Mr. Hatcheson's genius is its own punishment; and she might, if she had taken a different line, have gently led him towards the light. All this darts

through her head while the 'This *is* luck, Emma!' rings in her ears.

'It is not *luck!*' she answers with more sweetness of voice and manner than he has ever before remembered, and with only just enough confusion to heighten her habitual grace. 'I heard you were here, and came up on purpose to find you!'

No amende could be handsomer, and his face tells her so.

'Are you going to lunch here?'

'Cela dépend! are you?'

'Cela dépend! are *you?*'

It ends in their going downstairs together, and in Lesbia being tacitly forgiven over a roast pheasant and a timbale. After luncheon they all adjourn again for half an hour to the nursery, and play Robinson Crusoe; and discover that Man Friday was a very much more rowdy character than history has reported him. Miss Biddy insists upon being a rather irrelevant missionary, and upon being dressed for the part in a pair of her cousin's knickerbockers, which are long enough to serve her as trousers. Thus

attired in a broad-brimmed hat, and with a hymn-book in her hand, she remains perfectly contented in a corner while the game rages round her.

At the close Mr. Greville walks home with Emma, ostensibly to pay his respects to her aunt; but Mrs. Chantry, as is natural at that hour of the afternoon, is out, and he pays his call to Emma instead. During their walk they have talked with easy triviality of the topics suggested by the objects and persons they had passed; and Emma has been even conscious of a certain affectionate pride in her recovered escort, in the evidences of how répandu he is that a passing through Piccadilly at 3.30 in the afternoon affords; in his height and the goodness of his walk. It is not the stress of intellectual elation that is the result of personal intercourse with the creator of 'Warp and Woof,' but it is a very good work-a-day satisfaction.

When they find themselves tête-à-tête in the drawing-room, without the chaperonage of the great thoroughfare, a slight constraint

falls upon both. They are perfectly at one, and extremely pleased at being so; but judiciously chosen subjects seem a little hard to come by. Mr. Greville ends by alighting upon one, on which he feels that there can be no risk of friction between them.

'Can it have been McDougall whom I caught sight of in Bond Street this morning?'

The instant droop of the corners of Emma's mouth at this inquiry shows him that he has not miscalculated.

'I am sorry to say that it very likely was.'

'He is back in England, then?'

'Yes.'

'Your face tells me'—(with a smile)—'that you have not changed your opinion of Lesbia's singular pet since we last discussed him.'

'I have wanted so much to consult you about him,' answers Emma, with a fresh access of feeling how fraught with comfort and relief this return to their old relation is—'it is one of the many subjects which I have wished to thresh out with you.'

He is too generous to point out that, on the last occasion when he had tried to thresh out a subject with her, she had made a good deal of chaff fly into his eyes; but as one of her fair hands rests idle and near on the sofa between them, it seems natural, and considering their ancient acquaintanceship and new reconciliation not presuming, to give it a slight and sympathetic pressure. It is very nice of her gently to return it as she does, but he is not quite sure whether he would not have been better pleased if she had not. It is treating him like the 'vieux papa,' as which doubtless she regards him.

'It is no use discussing Lesbia with Aunt Chantry,' continues Emma; 'she always begins to laugh, and to say that "naught never comes to harm." But I do not look upon Lesbia as naught, and of late I have not been at all easy as to her coming to harm.'

Her voice is full of the most serious concern and apprehension, and though privately her listener may be more inclined to share her aunt's opinion than her own as to the

topic under discussion, yet from the grave sympathy of his manner no one would conjecture it.

'Mr. McDougall is always with her now.'

'Indeed! I am very sorry to hear it.'

'He was in Grosvenor Place this morning when I went there.'

'Yes?'

'She had shut her door to everyone else, and it was only by accident that I got in.'

'Little goose!'

'He was sitting on a stool at her feet.'

'Cheeky brute!'

'Reading aloud to her—a novel.'

Her voice becomes almost inaudible over the final noun.

'French or English?'

'English.'

'English? Come, that is better. If it was a good one there was not much harm in that. Was it a good one?'

This point-blank question, though, since she herself has introduced the theme, she might have expected it, throws Miss Jocelyn entirely on her beam-ends.

'I—I—do not think I quite know.'

'You mean you have not read it?'

'No-o; I do not mean that. I have looked at it; it is—it is certainly not one of the ruck. It has very considerable force, and extremely high aims; but they—they might be misunderstood by those who were incapable of sharing them.'

'I must get it. What is it called?'

And here, though Emma has braced herself to what would seem the much severer trial of introducing the mention of her work, and even contravening the unwritten rule which forbids a literary artist to puff his own ware by sounding its praises, she illogically finds herself incapable of pronouncing its name. There is an awkward silence, while he awaits the title, which every second's delay makes it more impossible for her to frame. The interval, clock measured, is probably not nearly so immense as it seems to her before her companion asks, in a tone of extreme kindness, considerable hesitation, and even not a little fear: 'Has it a very odd name? Is it called—"Miching Mallecho"?'

She gives a great start, which the next moment she tries to disguise by a feint that it is part of an intentional removal from the sofa to an adjacent chair.

'Ye-es; but what made you think so? Ah'—as something in his face reveals the truth, her voice sinking, not from ire this time, but from dismay, to an absolute whisper—'I see; you *know!*'

By a slight and rather frightened movement of the head, he owns the soft impeachment. She puts up her hand—the hand he had lately pressed (after his audacious confession, will he ever again be allowed that privilege?)—holding her handkerchief—a dry one this time—to shield her face. From behind it presently come muffled words to his anxious ear:

'How did you find it out? Did you guess it? From internal evidence?'

'No—oh no!' with involuntary emphasis; then, afraid that she may draw an unflattering inference, he makes haste to add: 'I am not a good hand at guessing, as you know. I was told.'

'By whom?' In the ardour of the quest she has dropped her shield. 'By Lesbia, of course! It seems that she has been betraying me all round.'

'It was not Lesbia.'

'Who was it, then?'

'It was not Lesbia.'

'Who was it?'

There is such an uncompromising point-blankness in eye and lip that he dares no longer falter.

'It was—Mrs. Chantry.'

'*Aunt Chantry!*' repeats Emma, with red incredulity; 'you must be dreaming! Why, she was terrified at the possibility that I might admit it to you! She believed—but' (proudly) 'I can't say I ever shared the apprehension — that the knowledge I had written such a book would lower me in your estimation.'

She looks at him as she speaks in the fullest confidence of the indignant disclaimer which must follow; but it is perhaps because he is sufficiently occupied in seeking a palliative for his own blabbing that he neglects to utter it.

'You must not blame her,' he says lamely. 'I think it slipped out without previous intention on her part. We met accidentally at Heathcote not long after'—(he does not more closely particularize after *what*)—'I think we were neither of us very happy. She wished to consult me as to—as to——'

'As to whether'—cries the novelist, finishing his halting sentence with a firm voice, and an eye darting levin-bolts — 'as to whether it would not be possible to buy up the whole edition and burn it by the common hangman! I know! Dear Aunt Chantry! Generally'—with a lofty compassion—'love is supposed to quicken people's wits, but in her case it has blunted them inconceivably, or she would understand that when one has put one's whole heart and soul and intellect into a work, one is not likely to stand by calmly and see it made into a bonfire.'

He listens in respectful silence, if not with complete acquiescence in her sentiments, yet with a very thorough enjoyment, in the contemplation of her late unfamiliar, and at the present moment indignation-heightened,

beauty. He had forgotten how priggish and conceited she could be, and his amused recognition of these qualities endears her still further to him. He is roused from his agreeable musings by a direct and embarrassing appeal.

'Now that you have read my book yourself—but have you? Perhaps you have not?'

'Yes, I have read it.'

The admission is a scarcely less unwilling one than had been Tom Heathcote's on a like occasion.

'Then I may appeal confidently to your candour, not to your politeness, nor your kindheartedness—they are old friends'—prettily—'but to your candour, your cold sound good sense. Having read it, would you be a consenting party to the bonfire?'

As she finishes, she smiles with a sweet rosy affectionate confidence, and pulls the chair—to which in her confusion she had removed—a couple of inches nearer him.

Mr. Greville is in what is vulgarly known as a 'hole.' In point of fact no one would

apply a torch with a better will than he to the funeral pyre of 'Miching Mallecho,' but he is not going to imperil his lately-won and dearly-prized forgiveness by saying so. In his need he summons to his memory all the clever evasions of impossible truths that he has ever heard of, and even distressfully cries to the Jesuits for aid. It is Bishop Wilberforce who in the end comes to his assistance, a happy flash of reminiscence bringing to his mind that prelate's masterly acknowledgment of a presentation copy addressed to the author. 'I have received your book, and shall *lose no time* in reading it.'

His imitation is lamentably inferior to the original, but delivered with an apparent fire of indignant warmth, it serves his turn.

'That is a question which I do not think worth answering.'

She does not perceive that the blaze is made of tinfoil, and she draws a long breath.

'I thought I was pretty safe with you! I should not have appealed to you if I had not felt tolerably confident. I never think it is

fair to put people into equivocal positions'—his smarting conscience cordially endorses this sentiment—'and if anyone *had* to know, I would certainly have chosen you; but *Aunt Chantry*—how one's illusions keep dropping round one!—I had thought of her and steel as synonymous.'

'Even steel snaps sometimes in a frost,' he answers weakly, now thoroughly frightened at the mischief he has done, and prepared far to outgo the courtly Bishop, and plump even into a downright lie, if by that means he can see his way to repairing it. 'I suppose'—with an attempt to get up a wounded air—'that Mrs. Chantry paid me the compliment of thinking that your secret did not run much risk with *me*.'

'I am sure it did not'—(cordially)—'I never doubted you, at least not until to-day—to-day I doubt everybody'—(with a tragic *moue*)—'and if it were only *you!* But you have not heard the worst. Can you believe that Lesbia has actually told Mr. McDougall?'

'Well, that is too bad of her,' replies he, and this time he has no need to summon

either Bishop or Jesuit to his aid in expressing the very real vexation he feels.

He has quite as little desire as Emma herself—though their motives are by no means identical—that the knowledge of her authorship should spread.

'I knew that I might count on you to feel for me'—with a new access of friendliness and a warm sensation of how one may after all *almost always* count upon George Greville to see everything from the right and gentlemanlike and common-sense point of view—'and'—(lowering her voice)—'what hurts me even more than Lesbia's treachery to me is the evidence of her extreme intimacy with him given by her choosing him out of all the world to confide such a secret to.'

To the listener this logic seems hardly irrefragable; but he is careful to give no hint of dissent.

'You may imagine how very very bitter it is to me to see what I had written with such a single-hearted purpose of doing good, teaching, ennobling, perverted into a means of carrying on an—an acquaintance which I

would give anything to put a stop to before it is too late!'

He raises his eyebrows.

'*Too late?*'

'The very passages which—perhaps you noticed them; but I am sure you did not. To the pure all things are pure!'

Mr. Greville is guiltily conscious that if a want of admiration for some of the love-scenes of 'Miching Mallecho' be an evidence of impurity, he is very far from being as clean as he could wish.

'And though it seems that people with coarse minds can read an evil interpretation into them, you, at least, will believe how little I intended any such?'

An honest crimson clothes her like a cloak as she makes this appeal, for indeed the good red blood springs up oftener in defence of the truth than of a lie; and there is unmistakable fervour in the way in which her old friend rises to it.

'I would go to the stake for it.'

'And to think that it should be through *me*, through the gift which I have received,

and for whose use I am accountable, through *my* power of depicting, of kindling emotion, that Lesbia should—oh, it is too, too cruel!'

He has risen, and stands over her in very real concern. The storm that she is brewing for herself seems to him to be of the veriest teacup nature; but if you are kind-hearted, and fond of the teacup, its pigmy tempest may pipe up real bad weather in your own breast. The consolation offered by his friend to the dying atheist, whose conscience on his deathbed was stung by the thought of the havoc wrought by his infidel publications, viz., that he might set his mind at rest, since their circulation had been little and their influence less, occurs to Mr. Greville only to be instantly dismissed, especially as with the story there comes to his memory its sequel, that rage at the insult to his writings had burst the imposthume under which the atheist was labouring, and had restored him to life, to health, and to the power of inditing a great many more.

'I hope that you are perhaps distressing yourself needlessly,' he says cautiously,

divided between the desire of reassuring her and the dread of seeking to underrate the explosive power of the novel. 'Lesbia is not very wise, but she is a good little soul, fond of Tom, fond of her children, and as to poor McDougall'—with a smile of contempt—'he is scarcely the stuff of which Don Juans are made!'

But she only shakes her head with a melancholy superiority, oppressed by the responsibility of her genius, and so resolved to refuse all consolation that, much as he has valued their tête-à-tête, he is relieved to see the door at this point open, to admit the handsome, ample presence of the house's mistress. She seems to bring her usual atmosphere of bright work-a-day sense and solid, steady cheerfulness with her. Mr. Greville's last visit might have been paid yesterday, for all the surprise that she expresses at finding him on her hearthrug.

'They did not tell me you were here,' she says, with calm friendliness, and no one who did not look especially for it need see the glint of surprised pleasure in her eye.

'When I was at Mitchell's I saw someone who I thought was you walking down Bond Street, but it must have been your "astral body," as Lesbia would say.'

'Mitchell's! Were you taking theatre tickets? Are you going to the play?'

'No; we never go to the play now, do we, Emma? We have not had anyone good enough to take us, and I always think that one ought to be almost as nice in one's choice of a companion to the theatre as to the altar. Ha, ha! Our usual escort'—with a glance of playful reproach—'has not hitherto shown any excessive eagerness to "beau" us!'

'Will you come to-night, and sup at the Amphitryon afterwards? There are several good things on.'

'Done with you!' cries Mrs. Chantry friskily. 'Emma will not put a spoke in the wheel, I am sure. But no'—with a very marked change of key—'I had forgotten, you are engaged.'

'To-morrow, then?'

This time Miss Jocelyn answers for herself.

'I am engaged to-morrow, too.'

'Friday?'

'Friday? Yes, we will say Friday. There is nothing on Friday. No date can be better than Friday!'

This succession of eager acquiescences comes from the elder lady, but they are not endorsed by her niece.

The latter says gently, yet quite firmly:

'It is not at all certain, or even likely, that I shall be free on Friday.'

He shrugs his shoulders disappointedly.

'What a press of gaieties already! If these things are done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry? If this is your state in January, what will it be in June?'

'Do not pay any attention to her!' cries Mrs. Chantry impatiently, and with a slight frown, though her speech sounds like badinage; 'she only wants se faire valoir. She has no more engagement than I have. Do not you know a lady's "No" when you hear it?'

CHAPTER XV.

EMMA would never have been pleased at being thought capable of a lady's "No," but if she had been in her usual state of amity with her aunt, she would have let the accusation pass as one of that lady's venial eccentricities. But coming on the top of her betrayal, it is the last straw. She takes a speedy vengeance, and as it is aimed through Mr. Greville, so is it also addressed to him.

'What I mean is,' says she with great suavity, 'that I am afraid I shall not be back in time.'

'Back! you are going away? Into the country?'

Though Miss Jocelyn is not looking at Mrs. Chantry, she is quite aware, by an impatient rustling of her clothes and peculiar

drawing in of her breath, that she is acutely anxious to avert the threatened blow. In vain. As she has sown, so must she reap. It falls.

'Not *quite* into the country, though very nearly,' still smiling pleasantly. 'I am going a long, long way off into Kensington, where I dare say your fashionable feet have never penetrated, to stay with some rather new friends of mine—with the mother—the family—of Mr. Edgar Hatcheson, the writer.'

His face, dressed out in happy courteous looks, as he listens, turns instantly grave, and that and the blank 'Oh!' which is his only comment upon her information, make her tell herself how unfortunate she is in having, on the very day of their reconciliation, to throw down the glove, and what is worse, the identical glove, again.

The blow, though aimed at her adopted mother, has fallen with unequal weight of incidence on the culpable kinswoman and the unoffending friend.

Emma has, if not 'missed the blue-bottle,' yet undoubtedly 'floored the Mogul.'

Very soon he takes leave, and though while shaking hands with him she murmurs a conciliating question as to the possibility of a theatre *next* week, he does not seem to hear her.

Mrs. Chantry remains in the room behind him only just long enough to say 'Thank you, Emma!' with majestic politeness, nor does she again grace her niece's sight before the latter's departure for Tregunter Road. It is the first time in all Emma's life that they have parted unfriends, or that she has had none but servants to watch her exit as she rolls away, maidless, in her hansom, upon whose top lies, nearly imperceptible, a box so small that Diogenes might have found room for it in his tub.

Her reflections are not altogether agreeable as she goes. She has got her way, and had her revenge, and she is within a couple of miles of that centre of intellectual light to reach which she has quarrelled with everybody. Yet that melancholy line—

'The paths of glory lead but to the grave,'

keeps humming in her brain, and rising to her lips, 'To the grave! if not to the literal grave, yet to that of family affection, of tranquil friendship, of household concord!'

For the first time the thought strikes her, 'Is it absolutely necessary for her to go on pursuing this path, thick-set with thorns and sparsely strewn with roses as it has proved itself to her? Is her vocation so undoubted, in spite of the testimonies to the contrary which she has painfully and plentifully reaped?'

There has been no one to whom she could apply to answer this question, no one combining the two necessary gifts of impartiality and capacity. Of her immediate surroundings some are disqualified by prejudice and others by incompetence.

There is only one person among her acquaintance who unites all the qualities required in critic, censor, judge; acuteness, lucidity, fairness; and from unbosoming herself to him only a lack of moral courage has hitherto kept her back. It shall keep her back no longer.

When next—two, three, four days hence

—she retraces her steps along this very thoroughfare, she shall be carrying her sentence with her.

In imagination she lives over beforehand the scene of her confession. His start of surprise, his incredulity tinged — yes—she may as well be fair to herself—yes, probably very considerably tinged—with admiration. Then a grave look as he tells her, with that perfect honesty which she has always appreciated in him, of her faults, her crudeness, lack of restraint, too great daringness, imperfectly curbed imagination. Then, seeing her rather cast down, he will go on to say that, despite these drawbacks, it is a book of very unusual promise; that it is, perhaps, not quite fair to judge anything so 'hors ligne' by the ordinary canons; that it is extremely uncommon for a woman to show so close a grasp of such a subject, etc.

He is just warning her rather gravely of the responsibility attached to so singular an endowment, when she draws up at his door. Olivia's steward had scarcely a pleasanter day-dream. Yes, she will certainly elect him

as her judge. Before twenty-four hours are over he shall have decided!

* * * * *

Yet three times twenty-four hours are over and he has not decided, for the excellent reason that he has been applied to for no decision. The day, and all but the hour, of Emma's departure has arrived, and her secret is still locked in her own breast. She might tell him even now at this last moment if they were not in the dining-room, their privacy hopelessly damaged by an active-minded and not particularly tranquil-mannered parlour-maid, who is laying the table for luncheon.

Edgar had invited his guest downstairs under pretext of showing her the tail-pieces to the chapters of his one uncropped Elzevir, and in the futile hope of a final tête-à-tête, for the chance of which he has filched an hour from the political gentleman to whom he is temporarily secretary—a final tête-à-tête! as if in a house of the size and population of 404, Tregunter Road, such a luxury could by any possibility be attainable!

He has lured her from the drawing-room to escape his mother and elder sister, but he has been followed by two or three affectionate and alert-eyed juniors, with plenty of holiday leisure on their hands; and he has found the parlourmaid laying luncheon! He can and does make short work with his brethren; but the servant, strong in her rights, is too much for him. His last words must needs be set to the accompaniment of the rattling of knives and the clink of spoons.

The tail-pieces have been examined and admired, and Emma sets down the book with a sigh.

'And so this is the end of all things!' (glancing through the open door at her box, which has just been brought down)—'the very end! It is too sad! But' (touching her forehead meaningly), 'at least, I go away richer than I came!'

Nothing speaks our grief like to speak nothing, and he—at the beginning of their acquaintance the glibbest and smartest-tongued of the two—receives her announcement of her increased opulence in pregnant silence.

'And you will try and get me a copy of "Poetical Sketches by W. B."? I shall not be disappointed if you do not, as you say it is so rare—only a dozen copies or so still extant.'

'I will try; and if I fail, might I—will you allow me—to offer you mine?'

'Not for the world!—not for any number of worlds! Rob *you* who have so penetrated into the core of Blake's spirit, of its "first sprightly runnings"! Not I, indeed! But, instead, will you indulge me by reciting once again to me that exquisite piece of sportive fancy which he wrote before he was fourteen —"How sweet I roamed"?'

To the person thus flatteringly addressed it seems a little hard that he should be compelled to exhaust the few last precious moments in voicing another man's words, be they sweet as Hybla bees could make them. And never in his life has he felt the conditions less adapted to successful spouting, yet, after throwing a despairing glance to Eliza, who has just noisily set down a tray of glasses, he complies:

'"How sweet I roam'd from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the prince of love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

'"He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his garden fair,
Where all his golden pleasures grew.

'"With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage!——"'

The reciter breaks off in a rage that is not the less intense for being unvocal, and shoots a homicidal look towards the front of the room, where accident has hurled a peculiarly resonant table-spoon to earth.

'Oh, go on! go on!' in a rapt voice, and with a polite feigning of not having perceived the cause of the interruption.

He recovers himself, though with difficulty, and proceeds:

'"He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

'"He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then laughing sports and plays with me,
Then stretches out——"'

'If you please, 'm, is it a four-wheeler or a hansom I am to call?'

'A hansom, please! Oh, *do* just finish it!'

'"Then stretches out my golden wing
And mocks my loss of liberty!"'

'Thank you—thank you *so* much! Now you have given me a delicious melody to ring in my ears as I take my melancholy way home!'

'It is with sadly maimed rites that poor Blake has been worshipped this time!' replies he, with a bitterness which grows acuter in his next sentences. 'Oh, if I had but a room of my own! You do not know what it is, this perpetual din of interruption! But no doubt you *do* know! You know or, what is far better and rarer, divine everything!'

She shakes her head in pretty disclaimer.

'I wish I did! Sometimes I feel so obtuse, so thick-headed, "fat-witted," so wanting in the tact that sympathy gives!'

It is not disagreeable to accuse yourself of a string of bad qualities in which your own faith is but faint, and to a hearer who strenu-

ously disbelieves. But delightful as it would be if there were more time to receive the graceful confessions, whose unintentional insincerity both of them mistily feel, he wants the assurance of some more solid outcome of the last three priceless days before the brutal cabby—already coarsely slapping his arms together in the wintry air outside—whirls her away from him. The form assumed by the tentative he at last makes is far from satisfying himself, and his question cuts rather abruptly the thread of the narrative of her imaginary failings.

'Do you feel—may I believe that you feel—that the "friendship built upon books" has stood even *this* strain?'

'*This?* What strain are you alluding to?'

'*This!*' he repeats emphatically, with a comprehensive glance meant to include the whole *res angusta*, and alighting finally on the, for the moment, quiescent knife-basket.

'I only hope it may never be put to a severer one,' she answers, the red curves of her mouth stretching gently into the most

reassuring of smiles, and though the answer would not have disgraced Bishop Wilberforce, with her it has no casuistical double meaning.

'Then, if I do come upon a "Poetical Sketches by W. B.," I may bring instead of sending it to you?'

There is a second's hesitation, a slight shade passing over her bright brow, as the idea occurs to her of the little welcome, save from her, he and his 'W. B.' are likely to receive in South Audley Street; then:

'Of course! of course! I shall accept only too thankfully any half-hour you can throw away upon me. A friendship built upon books'—smiling again—'is naturally hungrier than any other, and there is not much fear'—with a look at the book-shelves which cover every available wall-space in the dull little room—'of *ours* lacking *food*.'

He can't doubt the heartiness of the assurance; and yet he vaguely feels that he would have liked, not exactly something *more*, but something different.

'And we are not half talked out yet,' continues she, growing grave at the thought of

her unfulfilled purpose; 'there is one subject, indeed, on which I am perhaps foolishly anxious to consult you, which we have not even approached.'

'What is it?'

'Oh, it is a long subject,' shaking her head; 'some people might think a tiresome one. I can depend upon you not to think that; but there certainly is not room for it between here and the hall-door; and, alas! I must go and bid your dear people good-bye!'

She has not far to go. They are all—certainly there are a good many of them—in the passage, the young ones having considered that their disabilities had been removed by the arrival of the cab; and they all bid her good-bye, the younger with vociferous, the elder with more quiet regrets, but all with homely heartiness.

It is only when she is actually in the cab that the son of the house for one last moment gets possession of her ear. Once or twice, nay, twenty times afterwards, she wishes that he had not.

'When the foundation of a friendship had

been books, must the superstructure necessarily be books, too ?'

The hurry and unevenness of his voice startle her.

'What better superstructure can there be ?' she asks.

'There are better things in life than books,' he returns, and she wishes that the almost inaudible tone in which he utters the sentiment had been quite so. Then the sad old horse lifts his head, the big wheel turns, and she is gone.

It is a very grave face which is presented to the pinches of the bitter little wind as she jogs along, and the reflections behind the graceful mask are not belied by its seriousness. Has her visit been the unqualified success which it ought to have been in order to justify her clambering over all the obstacles she has done to get to it ? Half an hour ago she would have answered stoutly in the affirmative ; but that last whisper over the splashboard has made her inward 'yes' a far more uncertain one.

Neither is there anything particularly ex-

hilarating in the prospect of her return home. She has successfully reduced the appeased and placable Mr. Greville to his former condition of alienation ; in fact, his last state is a good deal worse than his first. While as to her aunt—— But here she reckons without her host. Among the golden rules which have guided Mrs. Chantry's life, there are three from obedience to which she has scarcely ever swerved, *i.e.*, never to pull your nose to vex your face ; never to sulk ; never to cry over spilt milk ; and the outcome of one or all of these priceless axioms is such a serene smile of welcome, such an air of peaceful, gay amiability diffused over her whole person, as draws from her relieved and delighted prodigal the involuntary cry :

'Oh, how nice you look, and how good you smell !'

The last compliment is intended, not for the presiding deity, but for the shrine.

'Do I ? I am very glad to hear it. You know the flowers came up yesterday, but I thought Haines had not sent them quite so good as usual.'

'Really!' incredulously, and burying her face in a vase of stephanotis and lilies; 'and oh,' swiftly approaching the fire, 'how much warmer this part of the town is than South Kensington!'

Comparisons are not always odious, and Mrs. Chantry smiles internally.

'Well, did you enjoy yourself?'

'Yes.'

'They treated you well?'

'Yes.'

'Made you comfortable?'

An infinitesimal pause.

'They gave me of their best.'

'One would naturally do that to a guest.'

'And there are better things in life than mere comfort,' with a slight tendency towards a resumption of the sock and buskin.

'Are there, in this weather? And how did you like the lecture?'

'It was *admirable*.'

'And well attended?'

'No-o; the attendance was not good. But then the subject was not one that would appeal to the un—a semi-educated public.'

'No; and yet I generally think that anything connected with the navy is a safe draw, that our naval heroes are always popular. Blake!—he beat the Dutch Admiral van Tromp in the time of the Commonwealth, did not he?'

Emma smiles slightly.

'That was quite another Blake. This one was a poet-artist, who wrote the "Songs of Innocence and Experience."'

'"Songs of Innocence and Experience"? H'm! I think I should like the ones of "Experience" best, probably because they would be most like my own,' with a dry laugh.

'I am not sure that you would care for either,' replies Emma dubiously; 'but if I thought you would, I should be only too delighted to read some of them aloud to you.'

'My dear child, you know how sweetly I fall asleep whenever you read poetry to me.'

'I know you do, and yet I feel sure you could not fail to admire one or two of

them, such as, "Little Lamb, who made thee?"'

But her aunt breaks into irreverent laughter.

'That sounds very apposite to me, does not it?'

And Miss Jocelyn is fain in some mortification to change the subject. It is, perhaps, safer to reverse the catechism, and begin to question instead of being questioned.

'And you — you have got on pretty well?'

'Yes; pretty well.'

'I must not go away often,' with a caress, 'or you will find that you do *too* well without me.'

'Shall I?' pleasantly, but rather suffering than returning the endearment. 'People have been very kind to me. George Greville brought me that white lilac yesterday.'

'Mr. Greville?' with perceptible confusion, and yet an air of relief. 'He has been here again, then?'

'Yes; he came yesterday.'

Emma muses a moment or two, staring into the fire, then:

'Why should not his festive project come off now? Do you think that he would take us to the play to-night?'

'I am quite sure that he would not.'

The girl starts.

'Why are you sure?'

'Simply because he cannot be in two places at once, like a bird, and he is not in London.'

'He has gone down into ——shire?'

'He has gone abroad.'

A blank silence follows, broken by Emma saying in a low and distressed key:

'It must have been a sudden thought. He did not mention any such intention when I last saw him.'

'Did not he?'

'I am sorry. I wish he had not gone.'

The luncheon-gong sounds through the house.

'My dear,' says Mrs. Chantry, rising in obedience to its summons and to the butler's

announcement, and putting an arm round her niece's shoulders, 'I can quote poetry as well as you. Have you ever heard this very beautiful couplet--

'"She that will not when she may,
When she will she shall have nay"?'

* * * * *

Though it seems to Miss Jocelyn that during her three days' absence her aunt's *cordon bleu* has made unexampled strides towards perfection, yet she extracts but little enjoyment from her excellent luncheon, nor, indeed, an unalloyed satisfaction from anything during the days and weeks that follow. Outwardly, her relations with her aunt are what they have always been; it is only she herself who is aware that a thin cold gauze has been drawn between them. Her lifelong friend she has succeeded in displeasing so deeply that he has left his fatherland sooner than remain in the same town with her; while even the easy Lesbia, whether conscious of guilt or dreading another scene, seems to avoid her.

Her literary activity is at a standstill, the creative stream frozen at its source, the thawing warmth of the one ardently-desired approval apparently as far off as ever, through her own cowardice, from fostering it into new life. Even as to the intellectual friendship which she has hitherto looked upon as the one perfectly satisfactory relation of her life, the friendship which she has shown so much spirit in asserting, and sacrificed so much to retain—is she any longer quite sure that it *is* a wholly intellectual one? Back on her reluctant memory come one or two of the warning phrases uttered by Mr. Greville in the November twilight at Chantry, phrases which at the time, and for long afterwards, had filled her with suffocating indignation.

'You are innocently laying up for yourself a good deal of annoyance.' 'The gross encouragement you are giving to a man quite out of your own sphere,' etc.

She tries feebly to chase them away even now, but they come back and back upon her. Coarse and brutally indelicate as they are,

they gain a horrible plausibility when illustrated by that last whisper agitatedly thrown across the hansom-flap at her. Friends of the mind have no need to whisper to each other; there is no reason why they should not utter their calm high confidences at the top of their voices for all an admiring world to hear. They do not fling short, chopping sentences at each other with inflated nostrils, panting breath, and eyes—— *Eyes!* Yes; the speech may have the silliness of its enigma explained away, but the eyes! Several times in her life she has had reluctantly to recognise the existence of such an expression in unlucky orbs that have looked too much at her, and it has been invariably followed by the catastrophe of a declaration.

In all former misfortunes of this kind her one anxiety has been to let the sufferer down as easily as possible; but *in this one?* If it is true that she has grossly encouraged him, if she has innocently—oh, how innocently!—led him on! She covers her face with her hands, and feels it growing hot with

painful scarlet under them as her own speeches rush in all their foolish exaggeration of homage into her distracted mind—expressions of intense pleasure in his society; of gratitude for his notice; of eager wishes for its continuance—they gallop disorderly and terrifying into her memory. Too late she sees how easily and naturally they may be—how all too certainly they have been—misinterpreted! And even if she owe him no reparation? Has she any right to throw wantonly away such an opportunity as she will never again be offered of leading the higher life? Is she quite sure that she has the wish to do so? Does not the thought of walking side by side in noble unity of purpose along the lofty path of intellectual endeavour, helping and helped, present itself to her as the worthiest ideal ever likely to be set before her? She, chasing from his path those material obstacles whose fretting influence on his spirit she has herself witnessed; he, with indulgent admiration, sustaining and strengthening her pinions for higher flights.

She loses herself in an exalted dream, out

of which she is presently roused by the one plain and important question—'Do I love him?' Her face during her late high musings has emerged from the custody of her hands; it now dips down a second time into them.

Miss Jocelyn has never been in love, and, for a person who has depicted with such sultry force the amatory emotions of her Odo and Elfrida, has curiously little acquaintance with the tender passion. She is conscious that she neither behaves nor feels quite like Elfrida; but, then, for the development of her moral purpose, she has been obliged in Elfrida's case to describe the very drunkenness of passion. Can one be in love and not drunk? She loves his conversation; she loves his writings; she loves his high character; but does she love *him?* Is there anything wildly dear in the thought that some day she may find his arms stealing tremblingly presumptuous round her? And when they have so stolen, is there anything stammeringly sweet lying deep in her heart to say to him—any kiss 'set between two

charming words' waiting to be given him? It is with her face on the floor of her bed-room carpet—for her hands do not hide her half enough from herself—that she asks these questions; and if there comes any answer it is lost in the pile of the Axminster.

Whatever is to be the solution of the riddle of her destiny, the person most concerned next to herself in it seems in no hurry to find it.

For the first few days after her return from Tregunter Road, every ring at the bell, every freshly announced caller, makes her colour and start nervously, lest (since she has never had the moral courage to break to her aunt that such a guest may be expected) he may be suddenly sprung upon a circle of tea-drinking ladies, and upon a too-well-bred-to-be-uncivil, but agonizingly distant, hostess. But ten days run to a fortnight, and he does not come. Probably he has been unable to procure the rare book, which was to have been his pretence for a visit; but even so,

> 'He might have wrote
> A little note.'

The relief that his delicate abstention from any hurried following up of his advantages has at first produced is presently tinged with surprise, and, later still, by a little pique. But it remains substantially relief still. If he came to her, in the present chaotic state of her mind and feelings, what should she say to him? What answer should she make him? The longer he puts 'it' off, the better she shall be pleased. But if he puts it off altogether?

CHAPTER XVI.

'God be wi' you: let's meet as little as we can.'

EMMA is reading the *Times* one morning, when she makes a slight exclamation:

'Mr. Grimston is dead.'

'Is he indeed?' replies Mrs. Chantry; 'well, my grief would be more acute if I had ever heard of him before!'

'He is, or'—(correcting herself)—'he was the editor of the *Porch*.'

'Was he?'—(with more interest)—'then I suppose he had the misfortune to be related to that monstrous woman! it was enough to kill him.'

'He was her uncle.'

'Well'—(with an execrable parody upon

Frederic, Prince of Wales's epitaph, 'all I can say is—

> '"If it had been his niece,
> We had quite as lief."'

'I should think that it would affect her rather seriously,' says Emma thoughtfully.

'I sincerely hope so!' replies her aunt, and the subject drops.

A fortnight later—that is, a full month since any news of the author of 'Warp and Woof' has reached her—Miss Jocelyn is sitting one day about noon in her den in rather listless occupation, when the butler opens the door.

'Mrs. Hatcheson is in the drawing-room!'

The pen, with which she has been languidly copying into her Commonplace Book some stanzas of an out-of-print poem from a volume lent her in Tregunter Road, rolls on the floor.

'Mrs. Hatcheson!' she repeats uncertainly; '*what* Mrs. Hatcheson?'

'I was not aware that there was more than one!' replies the servant, the chartered impertinence of the old fellow's tone conveying

plainly to Emma's ear that, in his opinion, a single specimen of the article alluded to is quite enough.

His young mistress follows him in a flutter of spirits; the grotesque idea that this aunt-in-law, at whose witticisms Edgar has always shuddered, and relationship with whom he has grudged to admit, has come upon an embassy from her nephew striking madly across her own disordered brain.

'My dear Miss Jocelyn, I know I am doing a very informal thing—not at all in my way—in calling at this hour; but I do not even apologize;—such near neighbours in the country, and now with such an additional bond between us!'

Emma, after a perfunctory hand-shake, receives this exordium in blank silence, the idea darting icily across her mind, 'Under certain conditions she would be my aunt!'

'I heard of your visit to Tregunter Road'—with a well-informed smile, and a wag of the head;—'such a doghole! but we must get them out of it! THEY did not tell me of you, for which I shall scold them when we

meet; but it came quite accidentally through a gentleman friend of ours who happened to see you with them; and how did you like Mrs. William? The family did not care for the marriage at the time, and certainly some of the connections were not what you and I would call very gentlemanly, but *I* always stood up for her! *I* always said sterling merit—give me sterling merit, even if it is clad in homespun!' This admirable sentiment takes so much out of her that it is a minute or two before she has breath to proceed. 'If I needed forgiveness for my intrusion'—(with a smile at the improbability of this suggestion)—'I think I might trust to my news to win it for me. I only heard it this morning, and I would not believe it at first; I said "Gammon!" when Mr. H. told me; but when I found it was Gospel truth, I thought at once, "I will go straight off and tell Miss J.!"'

'Indeed! and what is your news?'

The shock inflicted by the sound of her own initial, cannot prevent a certain nervous interest in the tidings with which her com-

panion is obviously bursting—and which a foreboding or anticipation, she is not sure which, tells her in some way refer to Edgar—from piercing the cold politeness of her tone; but before the other can make the revelation which she is so palpably eager to unfold, the door opens a second time, and the butler, with a protesting moroseness of mien and tone, announces:

'Mr. Edgar Hatcheson!'

'I know that I am inexcusably early,' he says, beginning to speak in pale excitement before he is well within the door; 'but——'

He has caught sight of his aunt, and breaks off short in angry consternation—consternation so undisguised that, though the perceptions of the lady who has preceded him are not particularly fine, even she cannot be unaware of its existence.

'This *is* a coincidence!' she cries with an awkward laugh; 'I thought I should be the first to tell the good news, and now you have come to tell it yourself. Well, that is as it should be! People have always a right to their own news—ha! ha!—so I will run away.

We shall have plenty more opportunities of meeting!'—(with a confidential squeeze of the hand). 'I dare say you are often at home—to intimates, I mean—about this time of day!'

She delays several moments longer, vainly trying to induce Emma to fix a day for dining with her in a 'petty company choisy,' while her nephew writhes in furious nervous irritation about the room; but at last she is gone, and they are standing opposite to each other in white impatience.

'She has told you?'

'No, no, she has not! she was just on the point of telling me when you came in.'

'And you forgive me for forcing myself and my *relatives*' (with a disgusted intonation) 'upon you at this unseasonable hour?'

'I never heard high noon called an unseasonable hour before!' replies she, laughing agitatedly; 'but yes, yes, I forgive you—I will forgive you anything if you will only tell me your news!'

He had been enraged with his aunt for wishing to forestall him; yet his own narrative seems most unready.

Realizing the emotion under which he is labouring, an answering emotion—a sort of terror of what his tidings may be, and what for her they may imply—lays such hold of her that she makes a self-contradictory attempt to get away from the subject.

'I will forgive you even your omission to bring me until to-day "The Poetical Sketches of W. B." I see you have got him at last. But how unexpectedly well dressed he is; you must have had him put into that smart white vellum binding!' stretching out her hand toward a thin volume which he is holding.

'No, it is not Blake, he replies, not making any answering tender of the book; 'as I feared, no copy was procurable, or likely to come into the market—it is not Blake; it is—but no matter what it is!'

'You will not tell me your news, and you will not show me your book,' says she, trying to assume a pouting air, which does not accord with her character, in order to disguise her agitation.

'I will tell you my news; I want to tell it

you more than to anyone else on the face of the earth! You know that Grimston is dead.'

'Yes, yes; I saw the announcement in the *Times*.'

'You read the *Porch* sometimes?'

'Sometimes,' rather faintly.

'I mean, of course, you know the class of paper that it is?'

'Yes.'

'What a prize among journalists the editorship is regarded as!'

'I suppose so.'

'I met the proprietor for the first time at dinner a couple of months ago, and have come across him only once since; and yesterday I got a note from him, asking me to go and see him, and he then and there offered the editorship to—*me!*'

'To *you!*' she cries, a flood-tide of crimson surging up her cheeks, and a rush of triumph into her eyes, which might well have misled a humbler than he.

For the moment she has forgotten all her late fears, uncertainties, and misgivings; only

the original pride and glory in her author, her own particular genius, thus splendidly justified, flares up into flames.

'He had read "Warp and Woof," of course?' she says, all trembling and sparkling.

'I believe so.'

Out go both her hands to him.

'This *is* recognition! This is something like due appreciation!

'I should think it overdue—greatly overdue!' he answers in deep agitation, 'if your belief in me had not lifted me so perilously high in my own esteem!'

He has still possession of her hands, and she does not quite like to withdraw them, though a look in his eyes—a something besides the overt radiance, and which reminds her more than is quite agreeable of the burning torch flung at her across the hansom-flap—gives her a sincere inclination to get them back again.

'I am *so* glad!' she says, trying by a subtle intonation to give the expression of her joy a purely literary and amicable complexion.

'What an opening! what a thing you will make of it! I dare say' (with an imperceptibly rueful allusion to her own experience of the journal in question) 'that you will give it quite a different character—a higher tone.'

'I do not know! I do not know! I have not had time to think of anything of the sort yet. I hope I shall do fairly well, and not disgrace—but all that is so purely secondary—so relatively unimportant——'

He breaks off, and she—by this time she has unobtrusively stolen her white fingers out of his—stands looking at him with an apprehension which is very far from being untinged with admiration. Self-reliance and pride, and that third factor which is so immeasurably more potent than either, seem to have lifted his stature, and lit a sun behind his acute and thoughtful features.

Though Mrs. Hatcheson is his aunt, and would probably cry 'gammon' a second time when the marriage was announced to her, he is a man whom no woman need be ashamed to show to the world as her alone and deliberate choice.

'Good-luck never seems to come alone any more than ill-luck,' he continues with an obvious effort for collectedness; 'and upon the top of my good fortune comes the news that a relative of my mother's, who would never see her after her marriage, has died intestate, and his whole fortune comes to her'—a trashy thought traverses, without her consent, Emma's mind, Was the defunct one of the 'ungentlemanly connexions'?—'his whole fortune! It is no very great amount. I dare say'—with an excited smile—'that you would think it a mere nothing, but it sets my mother above want, and me free—free to——' Again he breaks off, and for a moment covers his face as one dazzled; then lifting a brilliantly happy yet almost awed countenance, 'I am dizzy at the worlds that open to me! The "new planets"—no, not new planets'—with an inspired smile—'since first she has "swum into my ken" there has been but one planet for me!'

She has stood before him, silent, if not carried with him on the storm of his passion—which strikes her as of a different quality

from the spurious tornado which had uprooted her Odo—yet 'dumbed' by it; but now once again at this imminence of the deciding moment of her life, the same terror as before, only a hundredfold stronger, seizes her.

The question — the demand which for weeks in the depths of her own heart she has been fighting off—is actually upon his lips. It must not—must not cross them—not yet at least. She is not ready for it—oh, more unready than ever. 'Yes' and 'no' seem equally impossible, and she is startled and terrified at the verification of Mr. Greville's warning words in the radiant confidence—nay, not quite confidence, for real love is never over-sure—the radiant hope that she has not been misleading him, that her affectionate looks and eagerly admiring words have been guiding her to his arms, which enkindles his face! She recognizes, oh yes, she allows that without thinking of it she has contracted a debt to him, but can she pay it? Not yet—not yet; he must give her time. By any expedient she must

gain time; must stave off, if but for a few minutes, the toppling avalanche.

Her eye falls on the slender vellum-bound volume which she had mistaken for Blake, and which he has laid down upon a table near by.

'Since you will not tell me what your book is,' she says, with an abrupt wrench of the conversation which is in high contrast with her usual smooth courtesy, 'I must find out for myself!'

She opens the volume as she speaks, and her eye lights first upon a dedication

'TO HER,

WHOSE GRACIOUS INFLUENCE

HAS GIVEN THEM BIRTH,

THESE TRIFLING ESSAYS

ARE HUMBLY OFFERED

BY

THE AUTHOR.'

'Do you forgive me?' he asks tremblingly, and yet with a happy certainty of an affirmative answer in his eye. 'I ought to have asked your leave.'

'Is it—are they——'

'They are a second series of "Warp and Woof."'

'A second series of "Warp and Woof," and dedicated to *me?*' says she in a low tone of profound pleasure.

Once again her deep pride and joy in him as a writer, as an intellectual guide, gets the better of her maidenly doubts and mistrusts of him as a man.

'Then you *do* forgive me?' drawing an enraptured step nearer.

'*Forgive you!* I never was so pleased at anything in my life!'

Her cheeks and lips are carmine, and her breath comes quick with gratification. Quite forgetting her terrors of a month ago, she stretches out a hand to him, but quickly takes it back, not from dread of its retention, but simply because it is needed to help its white fellow in turning over with careful delight the dainty pages of hand made paper, while her lips murmuringly pronounce the title of each article as it presents itself to her sight:

'"The Brazenness of Literary Thieves," "Mutatis Mutandis." I do not quite know what "Mutatis Mutandis" means; you must explain to me by-and-by. "On some Recent Forms of Human Folly."'

She pauses, and a sort of mist comes before her eyes. What an extraordinary coincidence! The above was the title—she is not likely to forget it—of the article in the *Porch* which had contained the murderous onslaught upon her novel. By what unlucky accident has Edgar christened one of his subtly-graceful papers by a name for ever associated with the most mortifying episode of her life?

She turns the pages feverishly to gain re-assurance from the look—how different, doubtless, from their horrible namesake's—of the contents. But what is this? What dreadfully familiar phrases are meeting her starting eyes? 'Young female, foolish, in-nocent of any personal acquaintance with the lofty society to which with such generosity she introduces us'! 'This puny scribbler,' 'colossal presumption,' 'high time to inter-

fere,' 'a score or two of these fools—we have not much fear of the "Miching Mallecho" public exceeding that number.'

'*Miching Mallecho!*' It is not a coincidence, then. This is the identical 'slasher'—the 'slasher' with whose authorship she had so confidently credited Miss Grimston—which had laid low her hopes. But *how*, by what extraordinary accident, has it found its way *here*, into this volume of Edgar Hatcheson's works, with its exquisitely flattering dedication to *her?* The mist is thicker than ever, but through it she points a trembling finger at the name, 'Miching Mallecho.'

He follows the direction in which she points with his eye.

'Oh, that paper! Do not trouble about that; it is merely a make-weight. The publisher thought the book not quite thick enough, so he stuck that in. But it is a nothing—not worth a moment's attention from you.'

At his words a sort of relief comes to her oppressed heart, and enables her to find a few husky words.

'You mean that you did not write it; that it is by someone else?'

'No, no; I wrote it. Do you think,' with reverent passion, 'that I would admit anything that was not the work of my own brain into what had the high honour of being laid at your feet? But it is an ephemeral trifle. The subject that suggested it—but I had not time to treat it adequately—was one that I thought needed airing—the tampering with such themes as Heredity by inept fools. The text was a peculiarly futile novel which seemed to me specially to demand castigation. Yes; that was its name, "Miching Mallecho,"' with a laughingly mocking accent.

For a minute or two there is silence—unsuspecting on his part, almost delirious on hers. Not a sound can force its way through her strangled throat. The shock has been too stunning. But there are things whose very excess of horror renders them incredible, and this—if ever there was such a case—is one.

Though she has heard it from his own lips,

seen the monstrous admission issuing from his mouth sailing upon a smile, she cannot—cannot believe it!

When a man's house falls suddenly in collapse upon his head, he dies without recognizing that it is his own beloved roof-tree that has murdered him.

He is beginning to look at her with a sudden startled tenderness of vague apprehension, when she at last frames a hissing whisper:

'You—wrote it, then?—wrote the whole article—the whole review of—of—that novel?'

She is for the moment unable to frame the name of her beloved dead!

'Yes, yes!' (now really alarmed, but still entirely unsuspicious). 'But why do you ask? Why do you point? Why do you look so strange?'

In the great crises of our lives we may rely upon Nature to come to our aid if we have previously treated her with decent respect, and the Universal Mother now hastens to the assistance of her suffering child. She gives Emma back a modicum of voice to

make the announcement of the supreme tragedy of her life.

'Because I wrote it!'

'*Wrote "Miching Mallecho"!* Wrote that absurd——'

'Do not heap any more insults upon it!' replies she, waving a prohibitory hand with inexpressible dignity.

He has staggered backwards, and is staring at her with eyes as starting as her own had been when first she made the hideous discovery. The blood-curdling idea has struck him that his lovely Egeria, his heart's high lady, has gone mad.

Her eyes and finger have returned to the fatal page, and she is again pointing, and this time accompanies the action with her voice, and in a tone which he dares not qualify, is reading aloud extracts.

'You say that "in the intenser moments of that coarsely-expressed passion, by whose aid the author tries to galvanize her dummies into life"——' She breaks off, but almost at once resumes a little farther on, 'You say that "among the milliners and 'prentices who

will pasture on this masterpiece, one or two may be found silly enough to take it seriously"!'

'Stop! stop! in mercy stop!' he cries frantically. He has abandoned the idea that she has lost her wits, or, if she has, there is a terrible method in her madness. In her eye is inextinguishable wrath and bottomless woe; but it is perfectly sane. 'Stop! stop!'

But she is relentless.

'You say, "Let her give us her views of the nobility and gentry as seen through the *airy* railings"!'

She has complied at last with his request, and, her quotations ended, stands facing him drawn up to her full height, and burning eye to burning eye. In those flaming yet freezing orbs of hers he reads the finality of his doom. Recognizing it, he straightens his back, and calls up that courage with which every man worthy of the name should meet his death-blow.

'I do not deny that those phrases are mine,' he says, in a voice that has recovered its steadiness; 'though, had I known that

the book was yours, I would have gladly cut off my right hand sooner than have written them; though I thought, and still think'—since it is for the last time that he is addressing her, he may as well let her hear the truth—'that they were merited. But in justice to me you must remember'—one final strain of desperate appeal—'that I had no possible clue. How could I guess that there was any connection possible between you and——'

Seeing him thus dogged in persecution, divining the wondering contempt of her offspring that pierces even through the anguish of his confession, she breaks in:

'And yet I had put the whole of myself—all that was best and highest of me—into it. If you had had a ray of true appreciation for, or comprehension of, me, you would have found it there. I suppose you did what you thought your duty; but you must be aware that I can never, *never* speak to you again!'

It is an essential quality of a wise man to know when he is beaten, and he does not dispute her fiat. Taking up his hat and gloves, he leaves the room, not without

dignity, casting upon her one last look, such as Adam may have thrown back upon the bowers of Eden. The sound of the clapping to of the front-door tells her that he has left the house. The second series of 'Warp and Woof' has tumbled ignobly on the floor, and lies open at its dedication page. The lady to whom that dedication is addressed reads it once again:

'TO HER,
WHOSE GRACIOUS INFLUENCE
HAS GIVEN THEM BIRTH,
THESE TRIFLING ESSAYS
ARE HUMBLY OFFERED
BY
THE AUTHOR.'

The scathing though unintentional irony of it overcomes her, and she breaks into the loudest laugh of which, in her whole life, she has ever been guilty.

* * * * *

Easter falls early this year, and as is much its custom, whether late or early, brings with it a revival of the hard weather. The people

who flock out of London to spend it in the country take with them their warmest winter clothes. It is wrapped in furs that a small party of people are standing round a fire, in a part of the grounds at Chantry, out of sight of, and at a little distance from, the house. There is no royal wedding or birth to justify it, and since the season is Easter it is scarcely necessary to say that it has no reference to Guy Fawkes, and yet an undoubted bonfire is blazing and roaring, and sending its red and yellow spires racing up into the cold disapproving sky.

A bonfire is almost always an expression of joy and triumph, yet there is very little of either of these emotions on the pale face of one of the onlookers — rather a tragic dejection as she stands motionless, her eyes fixed upon the labouring footmen who are heaving the contents of the last of three clothes-baskets full of books on to the blaze. They seem at first to be going to smother it, but in a moment or two the mighty element has asserted its supremacy, and it is licking and shrivelling and crackling the gaily

coloured boards, and tossing up the exultant brutality of its flames above their crumbling paper and vanishing type.

No wonder that it is burning well, for had ever fire such magnificent fuel? Two hundred and forty-five copies of 'Miching Mallecho'!

Yes, there are only five—the five that have passed into the relentless hold of public libraries—wanting! Vigorous exertion has reunited the almost whole little family before its final extinction. Withdrawn from the circulating libraries, erased from Mr. Mudie's lists, bribed away from private purchasers—these are in very inconsiderable number—here they all are—or, rather, here they all were—ignominiously hurled out of clothes-baskets by hireling hands on to their funeral pyre.

There is only one final act of expiation to perform, and without perceptible wincing the high-priestess advances to the edge of the fire, and tosses the original MS.—the beloved, the much-treasured, the sole—into the heart of the furnace!

Then—for human nature can bear no

more—with a convulsed face she turns and hurries away from the scene. Lesbia hastens after her; but, before they have gone six yards, she wheels round for a final look.

'Two hundred and forty-five "Mallechos," one Edgar Hatcheson, and one Malcolm McDougall, all burning together,' she says solemnly. 'Yes,' she continues, 'I have done with Mr. McDougall since the ungentlemanlike difficulty he made about giving up his copy, saying that it might become valuable to collectors as a unique!' Her companion attempts no rejoinder, and she goes on with gathering ire: 'And his Mrs. Smith was a fraud! How she misled us with her rather dark woman writing, and all the while poor Miss Grimston was as innocent as the babe unborn! I have no doubt'—with a lively streak of curiosity tingeing the mournful indignation of her tone —'that your wish never came true! Did it? You may as well tell me what it was now.'

A contraction of new pain pinches Emma's lips.

'It was that Aunt Chantry should with-

draw her opposition to my friendship with——' She is powerless to finish.

'The prediction was that you were to get your wish, but in connection with a death. Yet no one has died.'

A sort of startled unwilling interest shows itself in the depth of Emma's gloomy eyes.

'Aunt Chantry *has* withdrawn her opposition, of course, now, since there is no longer any need for it; and the whole thing came about through Mr. Grimston's death; so, in a sense, she spoke true. I *did* get my wish. Oh! oh! oh!'

'Do not cry,' says Lesbia soothingly. 'At least, cry as much as you please, for there is no one near—no one, that is, except George!'

EPILOGUE.

THE Chantry neighbourhood has ceased to give Miss Jocelyn to Mr. Greville, for the excellent reason that she has given herself. They have a house in London, and a few weeks ago the editor of the *Porch*, who is still unmarried, dined with them; but Mrs. Greville is not very fond of literary society.

THE END.

The End.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD.
J. D. & Co.

तिथि	संख्या	तिथि	संख्या